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Flirt to Death.

A NOVEL.

BY

LUKE LEARY.

NEW YORK:
J. S. OGILVIE PUBLISHING COMPANY,
57 ROSE STREET.



THE FLIRT TO DEATH.

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LUKE LEARY.

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THE FLIRT TO DEATH.

CHAPTER I.

JULES CHARTER stood at the north end of his apartments, his form shrouded in the bay window portieres, his fingers tapping the surface of a window pane. He gazed intently upon the magnificent marine view before him, his eyes feasting on the bizarre beauties of San Francisco bay that stretched out majestically until it melted into estuaries and lagoons or met the escarpments of the Marin shore where the hills and mountains seemed to frown down upon their own tremulous shadows. Alcatraz island, bristling with cannon and gloomy with fortifications, stood out in bold relief, like a grim sentinel, guarding the grandeur and welfare of the bay. To the west the break in the line of hills guided the eye to the Golden Gate, with its decaying crumbling fort poised on the side of a hill, beyond the vista exposed a shoulder of a promontory and a glimpse of the Pacific Ocean melting away into a hazy horizon, *mise en scène*.

Scattered over this realistic picture were curious Chinese junks with dragon-shaped sails drifting aimlessly about; fleets of fishing boats manned by swarthy Italians, shooting over the waves like flying fishes, their fin-like sails flashing in the brilliant sunlight; imposing steamers, commerce-laden, their flags and streamers silhouetted against the ethereal sky; a menacing man-of-war, huge and glittering, looking more like a giant sea monster than a ship; while in the channel incessant tugging at their anchors, rode a dozen idle merchantmen.

"It is nearly two years since I first gazed upon this scene, and it is grander now than ever," said Jules Charter, regretfully deserting the window that had so often fascinated him.

Youth no longer wooed Jules Charter, the courtship had been discontinued some years ago, like a bauble it had faded from him never to return. It was only on his photographs that adolescence still clung to him. He made his debut into the autumnal life of bachelorhood with a round shiny face and rubicund cheeks and a tendency to perspire. Twice he wore the distinction of a candidate for matrimonial honors. Twice he or she repented. By degrees his symmetrical figure became buried in the generous embonpoint he was rapidly accumulating, and if the truth must be stated he lacked many of the Adonis lines and Grecian facial embellishments that are so prominent in the composition of a hand-

some man, indeed the parsimony of good looks was no advantage to him, and no one was more impressed with this fact than the punctilious Jules himself. Nearly a half moon of baldness showed where time had left its footprints. The impress of many a nationality was on Jules' personality and disguised the birthplace of his father. He had the nose of an Ottoman, the eyes of a Teutonic, the gestures of a Frenchman.

The influences of an ample patrimony and a nomadic disposition which had descended to him, converted him into a shiftless itinerant, in which capacity he visited the four corners of the enticing globe, in the vain hope of encountering something more interesting than the sights of his own country—America. Much to his disappointment and chagrin his travels were devoid of stirring incidents and as commonplace as matins in a church service. But a seine of domestic troubles was yet awaiting him in the land he had but recently drifted to—California—where he arrived at a time when his thirst for new scenes and adventures had been palled, and he decided with a bold disregard for former associations to adopt that state as his future home.

At the present moment he was busily engaged in planning, negotiating, contracting for a costly residence. A few personal friends had reminded him of the inconsistency of building a home, when to all appearances he had chosen a life of single blessedness.

"You build the cage and there is no trouble in getting a bird for it," he used to say in reply to such twitting remarks. And out of the irregular and ugly excavations rose a beautiful mansion, but the interior was a curious arrangement; it was in truth all arranged for the occupancy of a man. The parlor was supplanted by a billiard room. A bowling alley spread itself along the hallway. There were gun racks, dog kennels, shooting galleries, a gymnasium and what not, in truth there was but one huge living room, which Jules had designed for his special comfort, but this was fit for the occupancy of a king.

While this incongruous residence was building, Jules decided on an outing. Summer was in full blossom and butterflies and flowers beautified esplanades and the song birds chanted their merry chansons, until the uplands and savannas rang with melody as Jules flitted away to the seashore, and inhaled the aroma of new mown hay and the ambrosia of the wild flowers along the route. It was his initial trip to the pretty little seaside resort made pleasing by its exhilarating climate and simmering inviting beach. The huge ocean with its yellow bar of sandy beach for a border, the tongues of white feathery surf, the bold green hills breaking the sweep of the horizon, formed an exquisite picture.

The bathing was fascinating and few could resist the delights of dipping into the blue ocean. Each afternoon a multitude of men and women dis-

ported themselves in that delicious intoxicating surf, a little world all by itself. Jules in the midst of this summer gayety deduced an immense amount of enjoyment from his sojourn in this picturesque spot, impelled by absolute freedom from social functions, for he did not know a soul, save a few hotel attaches, who regarded him in the light of a bonanza king. But alas for human expectations true enjoyment too often ends abruptly, and so in Jules' case. On the sixth day after his arrival, and this was a luckless Friday, he plunged into the surf as usual, but the undertow seemed unusually strong and the water chilly. "Oh well," said Jules communing with himself, "everything goes amiss on Friday." For this man was as superstitious as a woman. He was swimming about in the deep water like a porpoise, diving to the bottom, or floating around on the bosom of a bit of the ocean. To the north the slim long pier jutted out boldly into the sea, to the south rose and fell with the regularity of a pendulum the floating raft, from which had just alighted two ladies who struck out for the beach that was dotted with its complement of summer guests. Jules heard the two ladies chat and laugh like two school girls and exploit their proficiency in swimming and calculating on the time it would require them to swim ashore.

Jules found the raft inviting and climbed upon it to rest, but he had no sooner perched upon it like a turtle on a shoal, when he heard one of the ladies

utter a piercing scream and the next moment to his consternation, the waves swallowed her and she disappeared beneath the water. Jules thought of a school of sharks infesting the water, but he was a brave man and quickly decided to go to the rescue of the lady, who was either a victim to the suction of an undertow, the convulsions of cricks, or the raids of a shark. Not a moment must be lost, and he jumped off the raft and swam rapidly to the spot where he saw the fair swimmer disappear. A second later she came to the surface alongside of Jules, half drowned. Jules' arms encompassed her impotent form, and he brought her ashore after an exhausting struggle to keep above water. A small crowd had gathered, by the time he reached the sandy beach, to applaud his heroism; some shook him by the hand, a few ladies offered him money, mistaking him for a mendicant villager, but Jules spurned rewards. He was completely exhausted, and dropped onto the shining beach amid the plaudits of the blatant crowd. The sand and the sun soon restored him, acting like an incubator. But the lady he rescued was conveyed to the hotel not far distant in a far more critical condition than Jules. Jules, much to his discomfort, was made the hero of the hour and could have been a social lion, had he manifested an inclination, and columns of the local press flaunted his heroism to his discomfort. He had meteor-like sprung into a prominence which he would gladly have exchanged for his

whilom obscurity. Aggrandizement was never more undevisable than in this case. All his movements were now, he imagined, closely watched, his freedom abridged and his actions recorded in the diaries of maidens. Belles sought his acquaintance and asked for his photographs. He was flooded with invitations. So obnoxious had this prominence become to himself that he decided to leave the pretty little place and return to the city the following day. But before he had an opportunity to carry his resolution into effect he received a note of thanks from the mother of the lady he had rescued. And when he read the following note, a sense of pride rose within him, perhaps for the first time since he had emerged from boyhood.

“Your noble act in rescuing my daughter a few days ago has not been forgotten and she wishes to thank you in person. This she has been unable to do on account of her delicate condition. The doctor has now pronounced her well enough to receive a few visitors, and this note is to extend you an invitation to call this afternoon.

“MRS. PALASS.”

Jules read the note and blushed like a November sunset. His heroism had born fruit. He hastily proceeded to write an answer in which he modestly acknowledged the honor of rescuing her daughter, but regretted that he had made arrangements to leave the seashore that afternoon for the city. He

closed the billet by expressing a desire to call on her when they returned to the city.

Somehow the wording of the note upon its third perusal seemed faulty and a reconstruction of the contents appeared necessary. After a moment's reflection he tore it up and wrote a different reply, in which he gracefully accepted the invitation to call that afternoon. And that note with its results—the call—marked the dawn of a new epoch in his heretofore serene life.

“This is rather romantic,” he ejaculated dreamily, after he had dispatched the note. “But confound this invitation fails to specify the time of the afternoon I am expected to call, and I do not know what is considered the proper time. Two o’clock should not be any too early.”

After a deal of pondering, during which Jules, with considerable effort reviewed his knowledge of etiquette that was *tant soit peu*, he decided on two o’clock as the appropriate hour. He did not remember her face, and after a while his thoughts drifted into other but less fascinating channels. He blew a big hole into the cloud of blue fragrant tobacco smoke that enveloped him like a fog bank, and again the incidents of that rescue recurred to him with scarcely any effort, and he drew mental pictures of her, and listened to her imaginary conversation.

“What if I should fall in love with her,” he soliloquized, entering upon a second reverie, and spring-

ing up from the chair. "Ah, it would be preposterous. But my valor in rescuing her would give me great prestige and no mistake about it. However, she may be a mere overgrown school girl and the disparity in our ages would keep me from appearing in the rôle of lover. Of course I must prepare a little speech as there will be quite a little audience present when I call, I presume."

In a short time Jules found himself in front of the apartment of the young lady. His nervousness had entirely disappeared as soon as he stopped the flight of his imagination. After a short time he was ushered into the chamber with needless ceremony, and a sympathetic feeling passed over him as he breathed the drug laden atmosphere with which the room was charged. In the middle of the room, in a huge armchair that hugged the centre table and upon which her arm rested, the young lady, whose life he had saved, formally received Jules Charter. The reception accorded Mr. Charter did not lack in cordiality. When he entered, all dignity, there was no one in the apartment that served as a drawing-room except the young lady and her mother, a very kind and benevolent looking matron, who possessed the rare faculty of making Jules feel perfectly at home before he had passed ten minutes in her society. The young lady smiled pleasantly when he entered, and the exchange of a few commonplace remarks paved the way for her to thank Jules.

"Mr. Charter," she began, in a melodious voice, "I have taken the first opportunity to express my sincere thanks for your heroic deed. To you I owe my life. It was indeed fortunate that you were in the vicinity. When I struck the water my muscles contracted and I lost complete control of myself, and in spite of my efforts I sank to the bottom like a rock. I could see everything, but I was as helpless as a baby."

Jules bowed profusely, his face turned crimson, and he felt the few well chosen words that were to adorn the interview cling to the roof of his mouth as if they had been screwed there.

"I can assure you, Miss Palass, I have only performed my duty, a duty that I owed to my fellow creatures." He groped about in vain for more words, but out of the confusion of ideas he could not evolve a single appropriate expression. "You are a noble man," said Mrs. Palass, relieving the painful pause in the conversation, that received Jules' silent endorsement, "and my husband joins me in thanking you for coming to the rescue of our daughter in the hour of danger. You have saved her life."

Jules was determined to make another attempt to bring forth his speech and imagined the time for its delivery had come, but a bevy of ladies came into the room from all directions, through folding doors Jules knew not where from. Introductions followed and all seemed so glad to meet a real hero as if real

heroes were scare, and seemingly regarding it as the most important event of their lives, and Jules presently found himself all alone among a multitude of buzzing, pretty and vivacious ladies, and forgot all about the little speech for the second time. Jules observed that the lady he had rescued was exceedingly beautiful, far more beautiful than any one else in that galaxy of beauty.

"She has always been so fond of the water," observed Mrs. Palass, "but I think this has been a good lesson for her and she will not venture into deep water soon again."

"So you will try the surf again, by and by," asked Jules, timidly.

"Oh yes, indeed. I expect to be out once more—doubtless in a few days, and I hope you will be in the vicinity to rescue me should another mishap befall me."

"You can rely upon me as a life preserver," was the response.

Jules laughed as he imagined himself swimming to her rescue again, and soon after took his leave bowing to the right and left, and almost glad that the ordeal was over, and wondering if he had made a favorable impression. When he turned his back upon that company he was a changed man. All thoughts of returning immediately to the city were abandoned by him. He lingered at the seashore, the only place on earth that now possessed any attraction for this

love-lorn man. Already she had entered the depth of his soul and was taking root. Ah, how anxiously he was casting his eyes upon the scattered groups of summer guests to see if she was among them or if he could discern a rival, or looking around corners for a glimpse of that beautiful face. He could hardly wait until she made her appearance on the beach to brighten up his existence. He did not have to wait long, though her reappearance brought bitter moments, for he found to his grief she had legions of admirers, some of whom might prove veritable gladiators in a contest for the heart of a maid who possessed as many personal charms as Miss Palass. But she accorded him an audience, though brief, in a corner of the veranda, nearly every day, while a small platoon of young men were loitering and sighing in the parlor and accustomed haunts for an opportunity to show their devotion.

During two weeks into which many little incidents were crowded and during which jealousy, heartaches and disappointments embittered more than one life, and cast a shadow upon the seashore existence of many a hotel guest, Jules devoted his entire time, aye his life, to a precarious courtship, worshipping at the crowded shrine of beauty—Octa Palass—and many an admirer retired from the scene in dismal disgust. Crowds came and went, but Jules never relaxed his attentions, and it became manifest that their friendship had ripened into genuine love.

Jules courted her with the fire, dash and ardor of youth; though bald, fat and nearly forty, he breathed forth his intense love unabashed, but the shadow of a chaperon was always hovering about them. One night, however, she ingeniously broke through the barriers of chaperons and parents and joined Jules for a stroll. And it was a long time before the charm of that stroll melted away.

Gentle zephyrs, laden with a delicious ambrosial fragrance, crept through the summer atmosphere, kissed the oscillating foliage on the trees and made the night divine. They walked in the direction of the beach, that Mecca for lovers, without any definite idea as to their destination. Now they passed some cottage where all was animation and life. Through the open windows and doors flowed the enchanting music of violins and harps, and glimpses of the willowy and swaying figures of dancers and revellers could be seen within the illuminated house. Here and there the white ghost-like dresses revealed the localities of maidens who had condescended to come into the gardens and enjoy the night air and incidentally the company of young men. Every few steps they encountered strolling lovers, and the melodious laughter which echoed through the bewitching night air, gave evidence that they had selected their companions wisely. The epidemic of lovers outdoors that evening had spread all over town, and their eyes did not

encounter all, for the more timid ones thrust themselves into the deep shadows that hung over nooks and corners. Suddenly, and before they knew it, the mighty ocean rose up before them, vast, solemn, impressive, majestic, like a new world, like an Elysium. The boom and murmur of the waters, the ripple of waves were inspiring and suggestive of deep emotion. Who could extinguish the smouldering embers of love amid such surroundings! The moonbeams pirouetted on the crest of waves, or flung their silver darts into deeper shifting waters. From shore to horizon stretched a continuous chain of silvery moonbeams, gleaming and sparkling, dipping its links of light into leagues of water and uniting sky and ocean with a band of silvery light.

“The billows fall, while Neptune lays his mace
On the rough sea and smooths its furrowed face.”

Dryden.

“No, no no,” she murmured to his urgent pleadings.

The crest fallen Jules turned his face from her, a wounded and crushed wooer.

“Are you very much disappointed,” she asked, pressing his arm that sent a spark of encouragement through him, and laughing with a fiendish mocking ring in her voice.

“Yes, terribly. My life, my happiness, everything depended on your answer. You have blighted my

life. I cared only for you. Hope, ambition, everything dear to the heart of man, swept away by that brief but firm answer. You were an oasis in the desert of my solitude," said Jules, forgetting the sublimity of the night's charms.

"I am dreadfully sorry, but my parents are opposed to you. I feel as bad about it as you do, but it cannot be helped," she replied, with a toss of her head that Jules interpreted as unfavorable to his cause.

CHAPTER II.

SUMMER like a bird of beautiful plumage had taken its flight. The seashore had changed from a delightful spot to a cold cheerless place, neglected and deserted, save for a few gamins, or a disappointed, disconsolate wayfarer. The summer guests who had made the place ring with merriment had departed. In place of zephyrs, cold piercing winds swept over the beach with an angry moan. Back to the city once more with its bluster, roar and confusion, its excitement and winter gayety.

The double columns of street lights blazed and flashed along the clean swept avenue, dispelling the sombre darkness, disclosing spectral rows of shade trees and affording glimpses and dim outlines of palatial residences that nestled in the shadows of the night. The silence of the evening was penetrated by the noisy movement of a procession of carriages, their glistening windows revealing, like a mirror, a pair of shining eyes, a fringe of lace, or a white-gloved hand, fluttering up and down the glass like a caged bird. An occasional peal of laughter rose above the hum of wheels and the staccato of plunging hoofs. The train of vehicles rolled ponderously by and its clatter echoed in the alley, carrying with it suggestions of a bridal party.

Jules Charter, enveloped in a circle of fleeting peace and contentment, started leisurely on his way to the reception that was to be. A knot of loiterers lounged contentedly at the corner cigar emporium, half hidden by a film of tobacco smoke. They stared annoyingly at him and made flippant remarks not calculated to promote good humor. He proceeded unmolested to Furlong's, where by previous arrangement he had engaged a carriage. He moved restively about the place, in which a few lamps flickered dimly, for he was late and the carriage was not ready, his well dressed figure contrasting oddly with the stablemen and gamins that seemed to infest the place like so many rodents.

"To the Hotel Orient," were Jules' peremptory instructions to the driver, as he swung himself, with careless ease and a graceful movement, into the carriage. He had just time to adjust himself comfortably when the vehicle rolled over the planking and shot into the street, like a train of cars, swaying to and fro with the wild abandon of a rocking chair. It sped rapidly along a level stretch of the street until a hill checked its speed and the wheels began to revolve slowly up the hill, only to whirl down a steep grade and mount a second hill. The up-town Orient occupied a commanding site on the brow of a hill, a choice location for a citadel were one needed in San Francisco, where hills, as plentiful as church spires, rear their tops high into the atmosphere.

When the party of Jules and the driver drew up in front of the hotel, a line of carriages, resembling a black wall, flanked the entrance to the mouse-colored building. Within, Octa Palass, nearly smothered in furs and radiant with jewels, was impatiently awaiting his arrival, and nervously drumming upon the table with the handle of an expensive fan.

"Jules is half an hour late for the first time. Can it be that he is growing indifferent?" said Octa to her mother, looking at the expensive mantelpiece clock and changing the conversation from her father to Jules Charter. "I wonder what kind of an excuse he will have."

"Whatever the excuse, it will not be the truth," said her mother, in a voice full of accusations.

"Nothing I hope will mar the evening's pleasure," said Octa, after a pause in the conversation.

"I too hope a pleasant evening is in store for you. You seem to have forebodings. You should be more cheerful on such an occasion. What could possibly happen at a reception. They are such harmless affairs," returned her mother, calmly surveying her daughter with an air of pride, for she was notably beautiful, and the soft rich gowns and cobwebs of lace and lines of ribbon heightened her beauty. Hers was a beauty that defied description. A beauty that consisted of medium stature and perfect figure and such exiguity of waist! Luxuriant blonde hair crowned her head. Her large, lustrous, sparkling

eyes seemed to talk. A delicate cream-like complexion, revealing the blue veins, emphasized her beauty. A pair of slender eyebrows swept across her brows and matched her uniformly arched temples. A bright winsome smile played incessantly on her cherry red lips. Her small mouth nearly concealed her treasure of ivory teeth. Her faultless chin was graced by an exquisite dimple. And did not her small rosy ears of infinite beauty, her slender throat of ivory whiteness, her white hands, her nicely tapering fingers, her graceful gestures and her even and dignified walk embody genuine beauty and loveliness?

To the outward world it looked as if Dame Fortune had been generous to the Palass family, but behind all this show of wealth lurked ominous shadows, and the gaunt skeletons of misfortune rattled in closets. A storm cloud had come over the fortunes of the Palass house and their riches seemed to melt away like water through a sieve. Even the necessity to dismiss Octa's maid in the interest of economy became imperative, a measure that brought tears to Octa's eyes, for she loved her maid, who was often the recipient of a confidence, or a secret. The questions of the curious at the hotel about the maid were met with the information that she had been granted a leave of absence.

Jules presently stepped over the threshold of the Palass apartment flushed with elation. His happi-

ness could not be measured by words and his face was aglow with smiles. He chatted suavely, rapidly, but aberrantly, and presented a most anomalous excuse for his tardiness, during which Octa and her mother exchanged knowing glances. Octa soon checked the flow of his words by urging their prompt departure for the evening's social Mecca, the reception, the *vin d'honneur*. There was no further delay in starting, except the time consumed by the mother's kiss and words of farewell and wishes for a happy evening.

To Jules the very corridors seemed to smile, while his feet only encountered air, and as they passed through the hotel they directed swift animated glances at each other, like people who have found congenial companions. She stepped into the carriage, closely followed by the urban Jules. No sooner had her escort entered when she drew herself together, as if to leap from the carriage, while Jules was seized with mild alarm.

"Dear me," she exclaimed, "I have forgotten my fan. I left it in my room. This makes the second time I have forgotten it within a week."

Jules was upon his feet in a moment, ready to tender his services and gallantry.

"You frightened me. I thought something serious had befallen you. The fan is a trifling matter. It will be no trouble to get it," he said, with a merry laugh, as he turned to go after it.

"Please do not permit mamma to detain you. She often extends her two minute chats into the half hour."

"Do not be alarmed. You are too precious to be forgotten, even for a few moments. Besides I will heed your precaution."

Within the hotel Jules encountered many of the guests of the Orient on their way to theatres, parties, or other places of amusement, such as lectures, exhibitions, fairs, concerts, civic meetings; the extravagant to carriages, the frugal to street cars, while some were swelling the army of pedestrians. A few were included in his circle of acquaintances, and with these he exchanged a nod or a pleasant word.

Mrs. Palass stood in the doorway of her apartment and held out the fan, that indispensable feminine weapon and protection for which he had come, with apologies for her daughter and herself for causing such a great amount of trouble. A minute later he returned to the carriage, waved his hand to the driver, the door clicked sharply, generating a puff of air that fanned his face. Once within he handed the fan to the lady opposite.

"That's not my fan," said a female voice, not familiar to Jules, while a gloved hand pushed it back.

A dense darkness pervaded the carriage and Jules was unable to discern the features of the other occupant of the carriage. Before their was time for the

carriage to start, the door opened and a small man stepped within.

"Your pardon a thousand times," said Jules, apologetically, as he realized that he had gotten into the wrong carriage and started to rise. "I think my presence here is a mistake. I am Jules Charter."

"Here's a scoundrel who is proud of his name. What right have you in this carriage?" fiercely asked the stern voice, also unfamiliar to Jules.

"It is all a mistake. Stop the carriage and I shall leave it at once."

But Jules did not wait until the small man directed the carriage to stop, but opened the door himself and commanded the driver to halt.

"You shall pay dearly for this impudence and insulting behavior," continued the harsh voice.

"I am responsible for my acts," was the quick and defiant reply of Jules, as the carriage stopped.

"I have the honor to present you with my card. You shall hear from me further," continued the stranger, in a nonchalant but weak voice.

Jules thrust the card disdainfully into his overcoat pocket without looking at it and slowly proceeded to remove a card from his own card case, and handing it to the stranger started to leave the carriage. As he did so a pair of hands pushed him violently and unceremoniously out of the vehicle, nearly precipitating him to the ground. A street lamp shed its faint rays upon the carriage, lighting up the

countenance of the occupants, and Jules beheld a face that haunted him the balance of the evening. The small features of the man in the carriage were rendered repulsive by eyes that blazed like a serpent's and diffused a sinister light over it. A flame of rage shot over Jules and he shouted defiance into the carriage.

"You shall hear from me for this incivility."

The ominous silence was broken by the carriage door slamming with a heavy thud, but Jules neither heard nor saw it, for he continued his threatening, menacing demonstration until the carriage rolled away and left him standing in the street shaking his clenched fist after the departing vehicle, and berating the ungentlemanly conduct of the mean, small man within, and invoking the evil spirit to send anathemas upon him.

The short distance to the hotel was quickly covered by Jules, who, dizzy with rage, fairly flew. He found his own carriage still waiting and Octa Palass almost distracted by the suspense occasioned by his absence.

"We shall positively be the very last arrivals at the reception," she said, woefully, despairingly, and with a touch of anger in her voice. "I felt sure mamma would detain you."

"The responsibility rests entirely upon my own shoulders. It don't seem possible, but I stepped into the wrong carriage on my return from the hotel with

your fan, and I did not discover the mistake until we had started up."

"An embarrassing position. How did you explain your strange actions?"

"That task has not yet been accomplished. I humiliated myself with apologies, but my explanation was looked upon with disfavor, for I was thrust pell-mell out of the carriage."

"All on account of my fan."

"On account of my preoccupation, near-sightedness and carelessness."

"Yes, and this carriage changed positions while you were gone."

"That was the real cause, then. I did not think I could be quite so stupid. If I am not challenged by the man who gave me this card," said Jules, brandishing a card in his hand, "I will challenge him to mortal combat."

"Why, Mr. Carter. When did you come into possession of all that courage?"

"My courage is not to be trifled with."

"But I never saw you serious in my life."

"The surface indicates but little what is below. A retiring disposition often conceals a monument of courage. After all, why should one lack in courage? It is a noble attribute, and danger often melts before a shield of courage. The thrill in facing danger should compensate one for the risk, besides it brings about a consciousness that the eyes of the world are

upon you and if you fare ill, why all is over and you surely may die in a far less tragical manner than in a duel, for instance."

"My advice is not to invite trouble and strife. It seems to me there is enough in this world without seeking it. I am sure we can find much better occupation than to quarrel over a mistake that may have been unavoidable, as mistakes sometimes are. You certainly cannot have a duel in contemplation."

"Yes, but I have. I will not submit to insult, not if it costs me my life. I care not who he is, but let him insult Jules Charter and he shall pay dearly for it. But I must see what name is on that card."

Jules drew from his pocket a gold match case and producing a light read "Manuel Silva."

"A Spaniard, evidently," exclaimed Jules.

"Their carriage stood in front of the hotel?"

"Precisely—just where I thought mine had stopped."

"Then they must be residents of the Orient. There are several Spanish families at the hotel, but I never heard the name of Silva."

They talked of duels and their consequences and became steeped in solemn thoughts, until they beheld a mansion before them with lights shining from every window, casting a bright halo around the building in which mirth and gayety and merriment reigned supreme. They soon formed part of the brilliant gathering at the reception, and their thoughts

drifted into less funereal channels. The reception was indeed a brilliant affair. Distinguished people in all walks of life, the motley noblesse of the land, graced the occasion with their presence, and beauty and fashion added eclat to the occasion. There were rich bankers and jurists and lawyers, magnates and nabobs and grand viziers of wealth and a column of local kings. There was the wheat king, the cattle king, the steamship king, the land king, the silver king, the bonanza king, and so on; though uncrowned, but still kings.

The evening had well and pleasantly advanced far into the night when Jules, with vivid recollections of his blunder, suddenly became agitated and the color fled from his face, as he saw a diminutive man with a tall lady pass through the hall. It was the small face of the man with the blazing eyes he had seen in the carriage under the glare of the street lamp. That face was indelibly lithographed on his mind. The little man had all the indications of one who manages to keep his promises in the face of adversity, a little wiry, aggressive, and unyielding fellow who is difficult to crush. Too soon the reception drew to a close and the guests in clusters regretfully made their way to carriages, among which were Jules Charter and Octa Palass.

"The reception has been a great social event, a pronounced success," said Octa, as she pressed the fur collar a little closer to her neck, for it was a

damp raw morning, made cheerless by a clammy fog that enshrouded the city.

"Mrs. Donner, I am sure must feel highly elated," replied Jules, pushing his hat into an oblique position.

"She certainly has good cause."

"But Mrs. Donner's receptions, teas and parties are not half as interesting as our own affairs," he said, pointing to his companion and himself in turn.

"I was not aware I had any affairs worthy of consideration. Of course you have."

"Affairs of extraordinary interest cluster around you. You see I have not given up hope. It is nearly six months since our friendship has commenced. A friendship that in my case has ripened into love. I was too hasty before. I have but one ambition in life, that is to make you happy. You shall want nothing that the heart craves or the mind desires. Your wishes will only have to be made known, and they will be willingly fulfilled without dissent. Love has whispered to me, and when love whispers both ears listen. You are constantly in my thoughts and that is a guarantee of my undying affection. In the rôle of a wooer I can plead my case but poorly, but what I lack in flowery language, I make up in earnestness. I am striving to convince you how much I love you. Mine is the simple love of a simple fellow. Intrust your love into my keeping and it shall be guarded with solicitous care.

You alone in this world can bring to me the sunshine of happiness."

Jules, ebullient with love, went madly on, declaring his affection without waiting for an answer, sometimes looking into her eyes for an answer, sometimes gazing out of the carriage window into the blank unsympathetic night.

"Mr. Charter, you are losing your dignity. I supposed you had dismissed me long ago and that I was only regarded in the light of a friend. Indeed you surprise me very much. You have never been so serious as this evening before, and I liked you for that."

"But people must be serious occasionally."

"You say you love me intensely and would do everything in your power for me?"

"Yes, yes. Then you will at least consider my proposal?"

"You endeavor to dazzle me by a profusion of promises, mere buncombe perhaps. You are aware of the discrepancies in our ages. How do you propose to overcome that?"

"By a check for twenty thousand, a thousand for every year. I think that would even up our ages."

"Mr. Charter do not imagine that my love can be purchased by money. It must be won," she said, indignantly.

"My overture should not occasion offense. It is nothing more than a gift. For the matter of that it

is an old-established custom. All men love money, aye worship it. I am willing to part with that which I love to gain your love. So here you have additional proof of my love. It is simply a guarantee, call it engagement money."

Octa buried her head in her fur collar and was silent for a long time, save a few susurrant sighs that escaped her.

"True happiness is a rare thing. If I knew I could make one man happy I would consider that I had accomplished something in this world, performed a noble deed."

"Then you will accept me at last," said Jules, grasping hold of her and showering kisses upon her. "Noblest, fairest—queen of my heart—Goddess of Beauty—adorable, enchanting, bewitching creature—my wildest dreams realized—the proudest moment of my life."

When Jules had somewhat subsided she said:

"Mr. Charter."

"I have another name."

"Well Jules, has it occurred to you that it is very late and that we should be at home instead of in this inhospitable carriage?"

"It seems but a little while since we left the Donner party. But sure enough it is nearly four o'clock. Two hours in the carriage. It doesn't seem possible."

Jules stopped the carriage and sharply demanded

of the driver an explanation for consuming two hours to drive as many miles. The driver shut one eye and claimed he lost his way in the fog, and as he was to receive extra compensation for driving about town for some reason in which he had no direct interest, but in reality to give Jules an opportunity to plead his case, he was very vehement in denouncing the fog and topography of the city. However, the speed of the carriage was accelerated, and in a few minutes more they arrived at the gray hotel with its tiers of bay windows balanced on the side of the building, on which the shadows of four eucalyptus trees danced fantastically. Jules dismissed the driver and carriage then and there, preferring to walk home. It was nearly daylight when he reached his apartments, having had many incidents crowded into that brief night, and he could not help exclaiming:

“Oh, what an evening! At last the monotony of my life is broken, but things have turned out satisfactorily, so I mustn't complain.”

Then he dropped into a chair and fell asleep. As for Octa Palass, she made her way noiselessly into her parents' apartments, where nothing but the mantelpiece clock, which seemed to make as much noise as fifty clocks, broke the stillness of the night. She was so fatigued by the festivities that she flung herself upon the lounge for a few minutes' rest before preparing to retire. And as soon as she was asleep visions of receptions and chevaliers and wooers kneel-

ing before her haunted her. And finally her father appeared in her dreams. She saw him rise from his restless couch, his hair disheveled, strange gleams flashing from his sunken eyes, and engaged in making preparations to take his own life. She rushed to his side and seized hold of the weapon. At that moment she awoke with the horrors of the dream fresh in her memory, and noiselessly entered the adjoining room to see if her father was there. By the dim light that found its way into the room she saw her father's face sunken in the pillow, pallid but calm, and she placed her hand upon his cheek and it was warm with life. But her dream in part was true. Ten minutes before she awoke her father with pistol in hand passed by her. The dim light revealed her and lit up her face, and he stopped in his wild insane desire and gazed upon her.

"My child," he exclaimed. "I must fight this battle to the bitter end. I will not give up. I owe it to myself and my family to fight this the greatest battle of my life," and he carefully placed the shining pistol into its accustomed bureau drawer and retired once more. Her presence had saved her father.

Later that morning Hugh Palass was sitting in his apartments nervously reading the morning paper, when Octa approached and tenderly kissed her father.

"My dear father," she said, as she stroked his hair streaked with gray, "you seem ill this morning?"

"Yes, my child and little wonder," he said as he

caressed her. "The awful strain is telling upon me. Ruin stares me in the face wherever I go."

"I wish I could help you."

"But there is nothing that you can do, and to worry will only burden you when you should be free from cares. It is quite enough for me to worry. Why are you about so early?"

"I heard you had begun the day already and I wished to keep you company and perhaps to tell you that Jules has proposed again."

"And you have not accepted him," said her father, rising from the chair.

"Oh, yes," she replied, with a laugh.

"Thank goodness," said her father as he sank back into the depths of the chair with a sigh of relief. "I feel easier. Let the crash come if it must. The hand of ruin can now accomplish its work. I was fearful that the failure would injure your prospects."

In the dim light Mrs. Palass was seen approaching from the bed-chamber, her eyes heavy from lack of sleep, for she too felt the strain of an impending financial disaster.

"So my child you are engaged?"

"Yes, but I do not love him."

"Not love him? Why have you encouraged him then?"

"It was all done to help my father, whom I love; but Jules shall never learn that I do not love him."

"My only fear is you will not be happy with a

man you do not love. But my child, you say you have accepted him to help your father. In what way will it help us?"

"Oh, he is to deliver to me a check for twenty thousand dollars."

"Then we must hasten the wedding on some pretext or other, and I may yet be saved," said her father.

"My child," said her mother, "you have done wrong. You have sold yourself. I trust it was not your suggestion."

"It was done at my instance. I mentioned the discrepancy in our ages and he immediately suggested to wipe out the difference by a money consideration. Of course I vehemently opposed it, feigning disgust and indignation, but I assumed the rôle of a good Samaritan and stooped to make him happy by accepting him."

With this the daily life of the Palass family was inaugurated. Hugh Palass was revolving in his mind the hostile attitude of his large and increasing circle of creditors, and his wife conjectured too well the food his mind was devouring.

"Have we no more possessions that can be converted into money?"

"Nothing but the desert lands, and who wants them? I doubt if I could find one who would accept them as a gift. It would be a sad waste of time trying to convert them into money."

Before he left for down town to face his tormentors a green lithographed check, duly certified to, glistening with figures, and drawn in favor of Octa Palass and containing the dashing signature of Jules Charter, was received by her through special messenger. Enclosed with it was this note:

"In explanation of my haste in sending you this check, I can only state that it is to prove how sincerely I love you, and trust you will accept it in the spirit in which it is tendered.

"JULES CHARTER."

The parents looked at each other in astonishment.

Octa lost no time in conveying it to her father. Mr. Palass looked at it several times and then burst into tears, not tears of joy, but tears of humiliation. "Was his daughter compelled to sell her affection, her happiness," he asked himself. He was about to refuse it, but she stopped him.

"Take it, father, take it, anything but ruin."

He kissed his daughter tenderly, meanwhile exclaiming, "Saved, saved."

They watched him as he disappeared with the check in his possession. It had a salutary effect upon him. His step was more agile, and the dark, deep lines in his face already seemed in a measure eliminated. When he passed boldly into his office every one connected with the place, greeted him with cheerful spontaneous words, instead of the forced

smiles and labored salutations that he had been accustomed to receive the past four months.

Had they heard of his daughter's check and knew that the credit of the house would be maintained?

"What event was transpiring now? Would the Palass house survive?" he asked himself, puzzling over the complex situation.

He was not kept in intolerable doubt and agonizing suspense long. His confidential man, with smiles of satisfaction playing up and down his contented corpulent countenance, came forward with the airs of a wise man, and pointed in the direction of the inner office. Mr. Palass gloomily followed his private secretary.

"They have struck it," he began, as they passed side by side through the door.

"Struck it!" exclaimed Mr. Palass in a dazed manner, his eyes wandering about the familiar furniture and fixtures.

"Yes, sir, struck oil. You will be numbered among millionaires inside of a month," prophesied the confidential man, suddenly becoming grave as he passed his employer a telegram with as much care and solemnity as if it had been a death warrant.

Poor Mr. Palass was stricken speechless for a moment, but he presently recovered and rubbed his hands in glee, and advanced toward his paper-laden desk. His fingers nervously clutched papers and documents that were littered about him.

"Where are my creditors, my tormentors?" he asked, running his hands through his thin hair that saved him from baldness.

"They beat a hasty retreat as soon as I displayed this telegram. We will not be bothered by them soon again."

Hugh Palass had been transformed into a new being. His jubilant spirits did not permit him to engage in office routine. It was with difficulty that he could give sufficient attention to the writing of a pressing letter. A few words of instructions and he hastened home to apprise his family of the good fortune that was lighting up his pathway. Mrs. Palass saw him approach the gate and shuddered.

She watched him with palpitating anxiety. She was filled with alarm by his return at that time of the day.

"The crash has come before the check could be used. All is over. We may as well prepare ourselves for the shock!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms around Octa's neck.

She attempted to avoid him, for she could not listen to his tale of ruin, but before she had time to flee he burst into the room, his face aglow with smiles.

"What brings you home at this time?" she asked, with a stern countenance, ignoring his smiles.

"Very good news," he hastened to explain, seeing that his wife was very much alarmed. "The desert

lands have redeemed our fading fortunes. While prospecting for water they have struck oil. I will soon be a rich man again, far richer than I have ever been. I return the check as I do not need it. My creditors have given me all the time I desire."

"Thank goodness it is time relief has come. This horrible feeling of being ruined is at last driven away. You are quite sure there is no mistake about it?"

"I have abundant proof. I am sure of that. What now aggravates me most is to think of the period of worry I have passed through when practically I was on the threshold of vast riches."

Octa alone received the intelligence with indifference. She buried her pretty face in her hands and became deeply absorbed in meditation.

"It is very gratifying," she exclaimed. "I alone will suffer from the threatened ruin, as alas I became engaged to Mr. Charter."

"But the engagement can be broken. It would not be the first instance of the kind," returned her mother, coolly.

"It will never be broken by me. There is such a thing as honor," said Octa, giving her mother a mild look of reproach.

CHAPTER III.

JULES, with many an explication, displayed the plans of his residence to Octa, who pronounced them marvels of eccentricity and originality, but unfortunately a building constructed on the proposed lines would be ill-adapted for residence purposes. She embellished her opinion with the declaration that she would never live in such an ill-arranged house, in which inconvenience seemed the predominant feature, where the kitchen was located in the garret and the parlor upstairs.

"You can build the house this way," she said, evolving a rough sketch of her idea of the interior arrangement. "With this change it will be suitable but not desirable for a family to live in. First of all the shooting gallery comes out, and I don't want the billiard room."

Jules manifested a proneness to adopt Octa's suggestions. He proceeded to take elaborate notes for the architect to digest, he explained.

"The shooting gallery comes out and in place of the billiard room?"

"A drawing-room," she answered, emphatically.

But Jules did not adopt all her suggestions, for the shooting gallery and the billiard room remained in the house as originally planned.

Jules narrated his singular experiences on the night of the reception to his associate and companion, Claude Morton, who went into convulsive laughter over the affair and treated the matter as a huge joke ; but a few days afterwards the complacency of Claude Morton was rudely disturbed, for he received a challenge to fight a duel. Claude experienced several sensations, that of amusement first, but he became more serious as he re-read the letter. The challenge was no idle threat, forsooth, the challenger was terribly in earnest and meant trouble.

"There must be some mistake," he said, as he held the missive away from him at arm's length, with as much fear as if it had been a bomb or an infernal machine. He racked his brain to fathom the profound mystery. At last a flash of suspicion penetrated the darkness and he hurried to Jules, who was in the midst of a consultation with the architect, talking about changes in the plans.

"Have you given my card to any one?" asked Claude, excitedly.

Jules became retrospective, and putting his hand to his forehead, as if to stimulate his brain, exclaimed :

"Not that I am aware of."

"Now are you quite sure?" said Claude, prodding him on to a still greater mental activity.

"Unless it was during the night of the reception. You gave me one of your new cards that day."

"That's it. Here I have just been challenged by a man whom I do not know. I never could have given him offense."

"Who is this spoiling for a duel?"

"Manuel Silva."

"That's the man. This is my affair. I will take the matter out of your hands. He shall not lack for an adversary."

"That will be quite impossible. The challenge is addressed to me. It is not transferable. Leave the entire matter in my hands."

"I shall not occupy a weak position in this affair. I, myself, mean to challenge him if you succeed in getting this one withdrawn."

"Very well, it will relieve me of the unpleasant duty of accepting, and will leave him free to issue the challenge to you," said Claude, in a mollifying voice, though he had a different solution of the problem in contemplation. "You should therefore hear from him to-day or to-morrow," continued Claude.

This ended the interview. Claude left Jules at liberty to join the architect, and after excursions into two different hotels found Silva, the small man with the fierce eyes. He had some difficulty in obtaining an audience, but finally succeeded, and at once stated the object of his mission and went into a lengthy explanation of the events leading up to the time the offense was committed, trumpeting the virtues of Jules Charter. The Spaniard was not as

easily convinced as Claude could have wished. He insisted on an interview with Jules. This Claude was especially anxious to avoid, knowing Jules' tinder-box temperament.

"Please state again the name of the gentleman who entered my carriage?"

"Jules Charter."

"Bid the gentleman to enter," said the Spaniard to the servant, who had brought in a card. Claude, again impressed with Jules' fiery temper, turned pale when he saw a visitor announced. Was Jules about to make a personal call on the Spaniard? He had surmised correctly, for Jules, a moment later entered himself, somewhat agitated and a little abrupt. Claude simulated indifference as to the outcome of the meeting, and acted as master of ceremonies. After a cordial handshake between the belligerents, he became easier and lost all fear of a bloody encounter, for the entire matter was explained and both humbly apologized.

They were about to separate as friends when the breach showed signs of reopening. The Spaniard rose, and with a sneer on his face, offered a parting advice.

"You had better learn some manners and not step into other people's carriages quite so freely the next time, or you will fare worse than on this occasion."

"I will take none of your advice," hissed Jules, assuming a militant attitude, and the next moment he

flew in front of the Spaniard and rained a few blows upon the offender's face with his open hand. This produced the same effect as pouring oil into a fire and further complicated the situation. The 135 pounds of Spaniard were no match for the bulk of Jules, and he made a feeble resistance. Claude sprang between the two and counselled peace.

"I withdraw my apology," shouted Jules.

"The quarrel is renewed. I must now be avenged at all hazards," vociferated the Spaniard.

The two faced each other with glaring eyes and menacing attitudes ready for a clash, and Claude had no sooner separated them when they sprang before each other again, and yet Claude's interview had not covered ten minutes. While the quarrel was brewing, a tall senorita, the wife of the Spaniard, entered the room, like an angel of peace. Her very presence seemed to disarm them of their fighting moods.

"The gentleman who entered our carriage, I believe," she said, pointing to Jules. "I am convinced it was a mistake. Come, you shall not quarrel over that affair. Be friends, and you will have nothing to regret."

"But he dealt me a blow," protested Silva.

She looked at Jules with piercing, inquiring eyes.

"Have you been guilty of such an ungentlemanly act?" she asked, pointing her finger at him.

"Yes," said Jules meekly, while advancing toward

her, "in the heat of passion I lost control of my temper."

"You should be taught a lesson. You need it. My husband is an officer in the Mexican army and a duel would be disastrous, as he has the reputation of being the best pistol shot in Mexico. I promised to use my influence at the earnest solicitation of your dearest friend. So there shall be no duel."

"It seems we cannot be enemies, so we must be friends," said the subdued Silva, extending the glad hand of fellowship to Jules, who scowled furiously but received it with averted eyes. So the smoke curled from the calumet and cast its soothing influence over those turbulent spirits.

Manuel Silva, officer and duellist, was on a vacation to the United States and what was more, held the commission of general in the Mexican army. Octa had lost no time in calling on Mrs. Silva, who happened to be a San Francisco lady, and begged her to intercede for Jules. She related how he had once saved her life and Madam Silva consented with the above results.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a gloomy day when Basil Floyd set foot into San Francisco. The very heavens seemed to weep over his advent. Little did he dream as he looked upon the hilly city from the bay, half concealed by a film of fog, the evil fate that awaited him. Unostentatious, unannounced was his arrival one day in September. How he happened to select an up-town family hotel instead of a down town caravansary it would be impossible to explain except on the theory that the hand of destiny was leading him onward.

Picture to yourself a tall, erect, broad shouldered man with handsome prominent features, an aquiline nose, brown eyes, black, well trained mustache that barely concealed his upper lip, and you have Basil Floyd, but there was a shadow on his handsome face, a deep, dark frown seemed to hover upon his visage, as if some terrible sorrow had stricken him.

When the head waiter piloted him to a chair in the dining-room many eyes were turned upon the stranger. The inquiring glances from ladies that met his eyes were not ignored. He often returned them and encouraged them by a smile, or a pleasant look, in truth a flirtation was exactly to his taste.

He had nearly finished his first déjeuner at the

hotel when Octa Palass entered and took a seat directly opposite him. Mr. Floyd began to feast his eyes on the glamour of her beauty and began to manifest a deep interest in the flirtation which presently ensued. She could not be blind to the singular handsome man, and she seemed plainly aware of his presence, and returned his transitory looks, that seemed so enjoyable with rare art, perhaps though only in a spirit of fun. There was about him a certain dash and self-assertion that brought out his prominent individuality, a trait so much admired by the fair sex. More furious and interesting and absorbing grew that fascinating flirtation day by day, and Basil Floyd never lost an opportunity to bring the flirtation to a successful issue, but the duties of chaperons are well defined, and this ardent admirer was handicapped in consequence. Patience with him amounted to a virtue, and he abided his time. He had prepared a hundred little speeches and platitudes with which to begin the conflict. One day as she left the dining-room she directed a significant glance at him, a glance of encouragement, at least so he conjectured, a glance that might mean much or naught. In response, he bowed and smiled successfully, for it seemed to elicit a feeble recognition that yet left the matter shrouded in uncertainty.

“At last the ice is broken,” he said to himself.

Basil looked forward to the next meal time with delight. It so happened that her father and mother

finished their repast and deserted the table, leaving her still absorbed in the menu; yet while she still lingered and pondered to her appetite, Basil took in the situation at a glance and boldly left his table for a self-appointed interview with the object of his admiration. She appeared unconscious of his approach until he took a seat alongside of her, when she arched her neck and directed a withering look at him, which he adroitly ignored.

"Your pardon a thousand times, but this seemed the much sought for and perhaps the only opportunity I would ever have to make your acquaintance."

"What do you mean, sir? Such conduct is unbecoming here. Your looks bore the stamp of a gentleman. I am sorry to find you otherwise," she said, half rising from her chair and casting a fiery look at him.

"One moment. Let me explain my actions, then you can condemn me if you wish."

"Then speak."

"I thought our flirtation would justify me. If you desire I shall not persist. We can be strangers again, the same as before this meeting."

"I cannot overlook such a breach of etiquette, excuse me, and leave the table at once." She was astonished at his conduct and failure to leave.

"I do not like to make a failure of a bad undertaking," he said, complacently.

"I will overlook your weakness, for aside of that you appear like a desirable acquaintance."

There was a painful pause. Octa took a hasty survey around the dining-room, now almost deserted. Basil's eyes scanned the immaculate tablecloth, looking uncomfortable and penitent, as if he half regretted his impetuosity.

"I am glad your decision was favorable," he said, fixing his eyes upon her.

"But it took you sometime to make up your mind. You have wasted a number of days. If you were obliged to resort to such desperate measures, why delay in enforcing your intentions?"

"I was afraid I would fail and then you might be lost to me forever."

"It was really fortunate you have made up your mind to make a decisive move, or as the French would say a *coup-de-main*, for to-morrow we leave the hotel."

"I thank my stars. I should never have forgiven myself, if I had found you gone."

"Perhaps fate would have thrown us together again in some other locality," she replied.

Basil was highly gratified and lost no time in laying siege to the heart of Miss Palass. There were flowers, but little poetry, few promises, but a display of letters of credit and certified checks, and sentiment was replaced by costly presents and a good supply of bonbons, and what contributed vastly to

promote a mutual interest in each other was the unfolding of the many charms that each possessed. She managed things adroitly, for it was nearly a month before Jules became aware that a flirtation was in progress, and a formidable rival was to measure swords with him.

"Jules, we must postpone the wedding day," she said, abstractedly, one evening.

"Why?" asked Jules, with surprise.

"Because of the impossibility to get ready in the short time that intervenes."

"Now that is not the reason, if you will allow me to interpose a contradiction. You have a desperate flirtation on hand."

"Well, you persist in discussing a ridiculous subject, you shall receive a ridiculous answer. I have."

"I give you fair warning, that is more consideration than I should accord you, if you continue to receive marked attentions from that adventurer all is ended between us," said Jules, his hands grasping the arm of the chair he was seated on.

"I shall continue to cultivate friends," she answered, with flashing eyes.

"His friendship has a deeper meaning, a meaning that forces me to bring this matter to a final issue. You can choose between Jules Charter, the gentleman, and Basil Floyd, the mountebank. Which will you have?"

"I prefer Basil Floyd twice, thrice. Of the two, it would be no choice, you would not figure in it. You wanted the matter decided, now I have done so," she said, turning her eyes from Jules with hauteur, as if to dismiss him.

"Your decision is final?" he asked, in a regretful tone of voice, sorry now that he had precipitated matters.

"Final, Jules. I am sorry, but I think it is better this way. I love him without an incentive, I love you for what you have been to me."

"I might have known better. If you had told me that before, my anger would not have been aroused."

"There was no occasion to make such a confession, and perhaps a little more time, or the intervention of circumstances would have placed him out of my reach, or cured my love fever."

The conversation turned into different channels and it was a welcome relief, that was appreciated by both. Jules talked of his house, the change in his plans that would now be necessary, the possibility of taking up his residence in a different part of the world. She listened attentively and offered suggestions that simply helped to widen the breach between them. She noticed it created offense, and she must counteract it.

"I will be your lifelong friend," she said, in a mollifying voice, and smiling so sweetly that Jules

felt foolish for thinking he had been in the throes of rage a minute before.

"You also will have a steadfast friend in me," said Jules, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

And so they parted almost as good friends as before the quarrel, if such it might be called. Jules' residence was not yet finished, but work was suddenly stopped upon it and the people in the vicinity surmised correctly that the engagement had been broken.

It was not long before the betrothal of Basil Floyd and Octa Palass was blazoned, and preparations were made for the wedding. The trousseau had already been ordered, and it would serve as well for one occasion as the other, there being only a change in the bridegroom, argued Mrs. Palass, and her argument won the day.

Rodney Floyd, the father of Basil Floyd, was sojourning in southern California, and he arrived in San Francisco two weeks before the wedding. Naturally he became a guest of the Palass'.

Hugh Palass and Rodney Floyd found in each other congenial company and became bosom friends. Behind them lay their past, which in both instances were honorable careers; before them a brief and uncertain future. A successful venture was recounted with startling detail, a disastrous misfortune parsimoniously outlined. Possessed of reminiscent moods they devoted nearly the entire day before the wed-

ding to a review of their past. They talked about their gratifying successes, their dismal failures, their lofty expectations, their bitter disappointments. After all how nearly akin were their careers. They looked with pride upon an epoch of success and still worried over periods of reverses. True the circumstances varied a little, the incidents were dissimilar, but there was a sameness about them that almost made their lives identical, and with a few corrections the individual history of the one would have fitted that of the other.

In appearance Mr. Palass was aging rapidly, as his white hair abundantly testified, yet his vitality seemed to have undergone but little change.

His wealth was established, his daughter about to be married to an estimable young man with excellent prospects, and it looked as if the most stirring incidents of his life had passed.

"Would you lead a different life, if you had to begin anew again?" asked Mr. Palass.

"No, I think not," said Mr. Floyd, with an effort.

The next day the principal topic for discussion was the news which reached them of the destruction accomplished by a violent storm along the Pacific coast in which three coastwise vessels and one deep sea-going ship had perished.

"What terrible sufferings that shipwrecked crew must have passed through outside of the Heads," said Mr. Floyd.

“Simply awful,” replied Mr. Palass. “Whenever the Pacific brews a storm you may be sure there will be shipwrecks and marine disasters. A dozen lives were lost yesterday, and terrible sufferings endured by the survivors. The horrors of shipwrecks, the feelings of solitude and utter helplessness can never be realized by those who have never witnessed a marine disaster. I was an active participant in one. It was on the Great Lakes. I have not yet finished congratulating myself on my narrow escape. That wreck has prevented me from venturing on the water ever since. But that was before I had established my residence in California. An era of prosperity had dawned upon me and I resolved to visit the scenes of my boyhood in Connecticut, scenes around which my fancy had woven a network of charms. My wife and three-year old son were chosen as traveling companions. Together we boarded a lake steamer at Detroit bound for Buffalo from which point our journey was to be accomplished by rail. A calm and perfect day in the fall of the year added additional charms to the attractions and diversions of a lake voyage. Scarcely as much as a ripple disturbed the mirror-like surface of the lake, as the steamer plowed through its hazy waters, leaving a white foamy trail behind in its wake. Suddenly and without any warning a white squall struck our steamer, sending a tremor through it from stem to stern. Then came a violent gale which was trans-

formed into a tempest. The steamer heaved and rocked and quaked, swayed to one side and then the other in that boiling, eddying, lashing sea, in that mutiny of the elements. All on board, from the captain down to the most ignorant deck hand, began to realize that no craft, however stanch, could long withstand the fury of such a hurricane.

“The mad and distorted elements were engaged in a mortal combat with the steamer. All knew that escape from the jaws of death was only possible through the intervention of a miracle. The steamer was being hastily broken, irregularly splintered and roughly ground into useless fragments by the incessant fury and force of the raging and relentless storm. The flag pole and ornamental parts of the steamer exposed to the wind were wrenched off like mere paper and tossed into the water. The loss of the rudder was a calamitous mishap, and with it the last vestige of hope faded away. Unmanageable and unguided it would now take only minutes instead of hours for the steamer to drift rapidly toward shore, to be dashed to pieces and strewn in sections along the shore. In the life preservers which were brought into use, the passengers saw a faint ray of hope. Amid the screams of piercing winds and roars of waters, the blurred sound of orders to man the lifeboats could be heard. The first boat that set out on its perilous voyage was soon swamped by the tremendous waves running and rolling over each other like

water down a cataract, and we saw our fellow passengers of a few minutes before floating around for a moment and then disappear right before our eyes; but we were helpless. To watch the struggles of the helpless beings battling for their lives in the surging waters would melt the stoutest hearts. Their death struggle had come, ours must follow. The oppressive uncertainty still further discouraged our disheartened band. Some offered fervent but incoherent prayers, others moaned piteously and wrung their hands. We saw what was in store for those who still clung to the steamer, which was now slowly giving away under our feet, lurching, reeling and sinking deeper every moment into that maelstrom. All of the occupants of the first boat perished, including four members of the steamer's crew. To remain on the steamer meant certain death. Two more lifeboats were manned and passengers transferred into them from the helpless steamer. The last man had scarcely deserted the steamer when it struck on some rocks, and the shrieks of creaking timbers and the sibilant sound of escaping steam could be heard above the noise of the waves and the tempest. Myself, wife and son were in the last boat to leave the steamer. The boat that preceded us was headed for the shore, but it floundered about in a helpless condition. Often times it disappeared entirely from our view on account of the waves running mountains high, and we thought several times

the boat had been lost. After a desperate struggle they made the shore and unloaded their cargo of human freight without the loss of a man. Our boat did not fare so well, for its passengers were unloaded uncere- moniously before it reached the shore, that was so near and yet so far. We were within fifty yards of the welcome land, when an extraordinary large wave capsized our boat. The storm, after the sinking of the steamer, abated a little, as if to gather renewed force. The men on shore seeing our boat disappear, hurried to our rescue, but myself and wife were the only passengers saved. My boy must have perished, for we never saw him again, and we are still lamenting his untimely death. By the time our boat capsized the steamer was almost broken up, so quick was the destruction, although we must have drifted about for some time before our boat was swamped. Some planking and wreckage was floating about, and we seized a plank and managed to keep afloat until rescued. I shall never forget that wreck. Thirty-five, as nearly as I can recollect, found a watery grave. Word was sent to a small settlement, and nondescript teams and wagons dispatched to take us to the nearest railway station. All of us were thoroughly drenched, and looked as if we had been in the water for long, dreary days. We were the most forlorn-looking crowd that was ever collected after a shipwreck."

Mr. Palass spoke with much feeling as his mind

recalled the stirring incidents. He wiped a few tears from his eyes in memory of his lost son, and settled back into the depths of his favorite chair thoroughly exhausted.

"How long since that wreck occurred?" asked Mr. Floyd, who had listened attentively to the narrative.

"Twenty-six years."

"And whereabouts did the steamer go down?"

"About forty miles below Erie, as near as I now recollect."

"And the time of the day?"

"About five o'clock in the afternoon."

"I remember it distinctly. The news that there had been a marine disaster reached Erie about ten o'clock in the evening and created considerable excitement. I think the 'Lakeport' was the name of the steamer."

"The identical one. How do you happen to remember it so well? Twenty-six years is a long stretch of time."

"Indeed it is, but I will explain. Out of curiosity a number of citizens of our town proceeded to the wreck the next morning. The only marks that there had been an appalling disaster was some wreckage strewn along the shore. We were walking along the beach, vividly picturing before our eyes the shipwreck with its attendant horrors, and keeping a sharp watch for any bodies that might have been washed

ashore. We came to some gray and time-eaten rocks and there I saw a boy sitting down. The little fellow was hatless, literally covered with dirt, and the expression on his face was an index to his abject misery. I approached him and spoke to him. He looked weary, sad and desolate, and stared at me with his frank eyes, but no amount of coaxing seemed to break him into speech. After awhile I managed to engage him in conversation, but he could give no account of himself. He could not even give his name. It was apparent that the fright caused by the terrible experience during the previous night had wiped out all his recollections of the past from his juvenile mind. I soon satisfied myself that he was one of the passengers on the ill-fated steamer. Doubtless he had been rescued or cast ashore and his parents, or companions, had been drowned, and when the survivors went away during the night he had been forgotten and left behind owing to the darkness and excitement. Of course we must take charge of the boy until his identity was established and he could be returned to his parents. It was such a sad affair that it at once appealed to me, and the boy seemed so deserted that some one must befriend him, and I took him home with the intention of adopting him if the attempt to find his parents or relatives proved futile. Every crumb of news about the wreck was carefully preserved, so were the clothes he wore when found, in the hope that they

might lead to his identity, but nothing that would even furnish as much as a clue developed, and I afterwards adopted him. You have seen him often and know him well."

"What, Arthur Floyd?"

"Yes, the man who is about to contract marriage with your daughter."

"Were there any marks on his clothes?" asked Mr. Palass, eagerly.

"Nothing except the letter 'P' was embroidered on a handkerchief which was tied around his neck."

"My God, that was my son. I remember the handkerchief. He was the only child on board the steamer and he is about to marry his own sister."

"It is most fortunate that the dénouement was made before the wedding," said Mr. Floyd.

Mr. Palass, who had suddenly changed from a gladsome man to the picture of misery and solemnity, arose and slowly paced the floor, muttering some incoherent monologue which was often drowned in the susurrations of a sigh. Folding his hands in front of him, he said, gravely and feelingly:

"We must acquaint the two of the relationship that we have abundant reasons to believe exists between them."

"The preponderance of circumstances seems to establish that fact beyond a doubt, though we have no direct evidence," replied Mr. Floyd, thrusting his hands calmly into his waistcoat.

“The sooner they are advised the better.”

During this time Octa and Basil were enjoying a drive through the park, rolling along beautiful boulevards, bowling greens and fragrant grass plots, fringed by flowers, palm trees and exotic plants, happy in the blissful contemplation that they loved each other, and unconscious of the clouds that were gathering on the horizon of their happiness, ignorant of the eclipse soon to be cast upon their sphere.

There was much confusion and discomposure followed by a summoning of servants. Mrs. Palass drifted into the library, unaware as yet of the discovery that had been made through the merest accident. She stalked to the centre of the room with stately tread, about to insist upon a change in some of the arrangements, with the arguments, that were to win her success, well chosen and arranged, but her liege lord waved his hand solemnly, but majestically, as if to prepare her for a disappointment. His remark that all arrangements would have to be cancelled filled her with consternation. She stood aghast, scrutinizing the lineaments of his face, when the singular circumstances were related to her as if unable to comprehend their full significance.

“It seems impossible of belief. Why must such awkward things happen to us. Everything must be countermanded and rearranged, entailing as much trouble as was necessary in making the arrangements originally, all for naught. All had been ar-

ranged to a nicety, after days of worry and sleepless nights, and I was really glad we had only one daughter. It seems it must be Jules Charter after all. When he hears of it he will be wild with joy and dance for sheer glee, but there is relief in the contemplation that overjoy has been fatal to people and who knows that Jules may fall a victim to it. It will be a terrible shock to Octa. What strange feelings will seize her. I would not care to take her place."

For nearly half an hour while they were waiting for the return of Octa and Basil the trio maintained a sphinx-like silence, which was formally broken by Mrs. Palass, when she essayed to discuss some new phase of the matter.

When the lovers returned they exchanged signal glances, as if to interpret the gloom and prepare themselves for some sad news, for written on the faces of their parents were terrible forebodings. It was cruel to separate them, break the charm that had drawn them together. When told of the relationship, Octa brushed a few tears away from her cheeks and exclaimed:

"It is too terrible for contemplation. What a visitation. I fear I shall lose my mind. Dear papa are you quite sure it is not a mistake," she asked, imploringly.

"I will relate the circumstances and you can sit in judgment yourself."

After listening stoically to all the circumstances, she exclaimed with bitterness, "I am convinced, alas the day!" Her eyes rolled around the room, the flush on her cheeks had quickly faded. She lost her self-possession and began to sob plaintively, and bitter tears bathed her lachrymose eyes, and she became "like Niobe, all tears."

"My child, you should not weep. Remember you have found a brother," said her mother.

Basil was also deeply affected. He embraced his new found father tenderly, and the tears came unbidden to his eyes.

Now ensued much confusion. Messages were sent hither and thither, orders cancelled and explanations prepared. During the family consultation which followed, it was decided that Basil should abjure the name of Floyd and return to the use of his own name.

The first outburst of grief were followed by joy in finding his father, and then Basil became strangely afflicted by a strata of melancholy. His condition grew worse each day, and it was deemed advisable to summon a doctor. The physician, with taps and raps, and tiny surgical instruments, diagnosed his case, shook his head gravely, and informed the family that his patient must have an immediate diversion, a change of scene, an extensive tour might save him. To this end preparations were made and his journey was to begin the next day. His tickets had been

purchased, his sleeping car accommodations reserved, and even the time to speak words of farewell to his father, mother and sister had arrived, when he suddenly succumbed to a mental malady. Strange discordant noises were splitting his ears, followed by a crashing, caving sensation, accompanied by extreme dizziness and intense suffering. Strange visions were springing up before him, objects duplicated. Lippitude set in and his hearing grew indistinct and uncertain, and he tottered in his walk, like a feeble old man. Like a glass dome collapsing, with the sharp noises of breaking, snapping glass, crashing to the ground, such was the sensation that accompanied his mental prostration. The vigorous looking man of a few hours before, with the bloom and strength of youth stamped upon his face, was now reduced to a mental wreck, and his physical collapse would soon follow. His mind, pungent, active, brimming over with intelligence but a short time before, was now incapable of comprehending the most ordinary matters. Worry and trouble could now make no impression upon him. The lustre and sparkle of his eyes had been replaced by a dull, ghastly stare. Within a few days the healthy glow on his cheeks that had escaped the devastation, was turning into a leaden and repulsive hue. It was decided to remove him to a private asylum. It was an aftermath of the marine disaster, which had left his mind in a weakened condition and paved the way for his mis-

fortune. This had been the first severe strain to which it had been subjected, and it gave away under the pressure.

“The saddest incident I have ever witnessed in my life,” said Mr. Floyd. “Two days ago Basil was the happiest man in the world. Now look at him, a miserable wreck, with nothing to live for. I would rather see him in his grave than in his present deplorable condition.”

Buried in oblivion with a malady for a companion, such was the fate of Basil Floyd Palass.

“Let flames on your unlucky papers prey
Your wars, your loves, your praises, be forgot,
And make of all a universal blot.”

Dryden.

CHAPTER V.

A SHATTERED idol and broken friendship were the ruins left in love's flight, in the passage of his *Cara Sposa*, but Jules looked upon the wreck with magnanimity, the antics of a woman's heart. He sought solace and balm in retirement, but it was not to be had at any price. The life of an anchorite was too dismal. In desperation he again became a frequenter of clubs, and the cordial greetings of old time friends rang in his ears once more. He was not the same careless superficial Jules the world had once known. For the most part he chose a dark gloomy corner, where with eyes riveted upon one spot he would sit and brood listlessly over the same old affair. He had lost confidence in everybody. An old time friend or confidant, sauntering up to him to renew a long standing friendship, would be regarded in the light of an intruder and treated with cold remorseless contumely. Jules did not improve, but the malady, whatever it was, grew worse.

Luckily the orgies of the flowing bowl did not appeal to him. Whatever his troubles, he had no inclination to drown them in riotous saturnalia. Solicitous friends became alarmed at his immeasurable sorrow.

"Lost to me forever. I wish my eyes had been

denied the sight of the enchantress, of her heart-melting beauty. To dismiss her, blot her out of my existence, that is the problem. Into what ignoble thralldom, or fettering slavery I have fallen. It cannot be always this way. It will either kill me or I will by slow degrees get over it, but what a horrible death in that event it would be," he would say, with resignation, to a few intimate friends.

Weeks dragged along as slowly as a glacier. Jules' avoirdupois was decreasing for the first time in his life. Evidently a love disappointment was an excellent cure for obesity, at least in his case. Then came the dénouement and when Jules heard that Basil Floyd was nothing more than her brother, he exclaimed :

"There is yet hope for me."

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Already Jules was preparing for her absolution, an indulgence that did not come without a struggle. But he became a new man fast enough, and manifested an inclination to be reinstated in her affection. There were various movements and countermovements and friends of the couple removed many an obstacle to bring about a reconciliation. At last they were brought together. They had not seen each other for months. Both had changed in that brief time. She was more solemn, more grave and given to dreaming, which diminished her vivacity

and alarmed some of her friends. He looked older, and a few wrinkles could be seen forming along the side of his cheeks, they were very faint yet they could be discerned. His bald head had also acquired more shine and polish, until it resembled a concave mirror.

During the entire evening Jules was in a semi-hysterical condition. At last he sprang up as if to take his departure, but took a seat close by her side. He passed his hand over his forehead as if to relieve the mental strain and executed for the third time manuevers of whipping the haze off his *pinca-nez*.

"I could forgive you," he said, rolling his eyes toward her.

"Forgive me? Why I hope I have not been guilty of a misdeed?"

"But you broke the engagement."

"Because you quarreled with me?"

Jules was non-plussed, forced a faint insipid smile to the surface, and asked feebly:

"Then you will forgive me?"

"I could not promise."

"But it is my earnest wish."

"Of course, that is a great deal," replied Octa, laughingly.

"Things haven't gone right with me since the estrangement. It isn't much that I ask. Remember I saved your life once and perhaps you can save mine now."

"Yes, Mr. Charter, you are forgiven. It is my nature to forgive."

"You did not find it difficult to forgive me?"

"No, it was in truth a pleasure. I felt a pang of delight."

Jules was again transported into ecstasy. Once more he felt the sensation of happiness creep back to its accustomed nook, he could even smile without an effort. He asked to have the engagement renewed.

Within two days the din of hammers echoed through the partially completed residence, and twenty artisans balanced and bent over scaffoldings, crawled in and out of windows curtained by cobwebs, and converted the deserted house into a hive of activity until it resembled an ant hill. The world and neighbors gazed on and conjectured correctly that a reconciliation had been effected, indeed that house became a sort of a thermometer that gauged the relationship between Jules and Octa.

CHAPTER VI.

THE financial situation of Mr. Palass had been ameliorated, and the wildest dreams of wealth were fulfilled. Where once the financial storm was raging, calmness reigned again. Like some placid stream Mr. Palass' affairs were gliding along serenely and *en passant*, his creditors disappeared as if by magic, to a man—freed from the pestering creditors.

The day, like some evil fate, at last came when Octa was to set foot into the sacred edifice within whose walls promises would be made, ties and vows recorded in the presence of God. Here was the place to deliver that which she did not possess, eternal love to the man who thought she must love him because of his intense love for her. There were banks of flowers, but they seemed like thorns; the world was gilded with golden sunshine, but it seemed like darkness; pleasant words of congratulation were idle palaver; beautiful bridesmaids, witches; and sacred orange blossoms, weeds to her; all an empty show. A small cup would have contained her happiness. No thrill could pass through her frigid heart for it had been turned into marble. She still felt something would intervene, wrest her away from peril before she fell over the precipice. She knew not what, but the pageant was forming.

There were rich gowns and all the paraphernalia that descends to the heritage of a bride. Finally, at the appointed hour, it was announced that the carriage was in waiting to receive her. It was the last link in the chain that was being forged, the manacle that was to bind her to him. Alas, she was not ready. She begged for more time and sobbed in her handkerchief. She shuddered and a tremor passed over her. Oh! for some one who would rescue her. She was already a few minutes late, at a time when minutes assumed the proportions of hours. Still she busied herself about nugatory matters, doing the same things over and over, but accomplishing nothing. At last she announced herself ready, yet she expected a hidden hand would manifest itself and separate her from a lifelong misery. The church with conical spire and its pastoral aspect was a long distance away, but it seemed but a step to her. Nothing seemed natural; it was more like a dream than a stern reality; more like a picture than living scenes. It was a simple but impressive wedding, and there was nothing to indicate that both parties to the contract were not happy, aye, extremely happy.

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Espoused at last, and on their honeymoon. It seemed incredible to Jules, who was desperately serious, like all men who are in love, while she was distant and cold and prankish. She was constantly

imposing on his good nature, that seemed to have no limit. They traveled extensively to cities, watering-places, spas, making a grand tour of the country. It would have been difficult to conceive of a happier mortal than Jules, and he continued to dream of love, and he talked in his dreams, jubilant over his conquest that had caused him so much anguish, and so many perplexing situations.

"Now, Jules, you know we are married. I thought I would remind you of it before you proposed again."

Jules, with lacerated feelings, relapsed into a brief silence, his face reflecting the abject misery that had drowned his fine sentiments.

"Is it a crime to love?"

"No, but it is a little tiresome at times."

"I will fulfill all my promises."

"What are they?"

"Your life shall be one round of happiness."

"If you succeed in making me happy you will perform miracles."

"Why does happiness seem so difficult to attain?"

"I have often wondered if I shall be truly happy, taste the sweets of happiness that we read about?" she asked, doubtfully.

"All my life, my aims, my energy shall be devoted to the promotion of your happiness," replied Jules, in a confidential tone of voice.

"There is but one thing that has thrown a charm over our union, and that is the incident leading up

to our meeting. It was very romantic and as strange as fiction," said Octa.

On their return their mansion had been altered, and was ready for occupancy. Here they settled down, the pride of the neighborhood, received their friends, and indeed their life was little different from the life into which other, but less fortunate, people had fallen. Marriage had produced upon her a curious effect. It made her simply indifferent to everything. The sun might remain in the heavens all day long, it would scarce attract her attention. A cloudy day or a pleasant day, which would she have? They were all the same to her. Her spirits no longer rose and fell like the needle of mercury in the thermometer, they were immobile. Her friends noticed it and asked for the cause of her self-sacrifice.

"It would have ruined him, driven him mad," she said, "if I had refused him. There was no alternative. It was very unfortunate that we ever met, or at least became conscious of each other's existence."

"But your own misery?" suggested one of her friends.

"That amounts to nothing. If I can make some one else happy I will not have lived in vain. That is a great deal."

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The banner pastime for Jules was rifle practice, and the hunt lured him on to shaggy mountain sides and

happy hunting grounds. He had acquired superiority in marksmanship, and bullets sped to their destination with unerring accuracy when he sighted a rifle. Scarcely a shooting tournament took place without his presence, and he always took a prominent part in it, earning enough medals to decorate three or four men. A rifle in his hands was a mere plaything, and a hunting expedition possessed irresistible charms for him. The dawn of the hunting season found him busy inspecting mildewed leather hunting bags, oiling rifles and preparing the small arsenal that usually accompanied him to the mountain sides.

There had been more trouble about the shooting gallery adjunct. When they moved into the residence, Jules had taken the precaution to lock it up, taking advantage of Octa's absence to indulge in target practice, but in this he was soon discovered, and Octa raised a storm of objections about it. She termed it an abomination and commanded its removal, but Jules was steadfast in his purpose to retain it, and refused to comply with her request. This nearly precipitated open hostilities between man and wife, and she always referred to the place with stinging words of sarcasm. It was a long time before she ventured within. The place seemed to have incurred her intense hatred and displeasure. One day, however, she strolled into the gruesome place and picked up a rifle, fired and struck the target without even as much as an effort, much to

her own astonishment. The remarkable performance was purely accidental. She at once became interested, and before long was an ardent patron of the place.

By dint of application she soon became proficient in the use of a rifle. In the meantime Jules was busy making preparations for his semiannual hunting expedition.

"Can I accompany you," she asked, while watching him bent over a rifle.

"I am afraid not," he replied, regarding her with a puzzled look.

"Why?"

"It is too rough a trip, and you could not endure the hardships."

"But I am fond of roughing it, and recollect I am stronger than you imagine," she said, assuming a military attitude and pointing to her shoulders.

"It is dangerous climbing over needle rocks and wading through the swift currents of icy streams."

"You call that dangerous? I don't. Besides danger adds spice to an undertaking."

"Besides there is danger from wild animals. A bear might overtake you, while men could make their escape."

"Overtake me? Why I would shoot him."

When Jules promised her in an evasive manner he would decide the matter on the morrow, she still saw the glistening bauble of encouragement. In the

meantime Jules held a consultation with the members of the hunting party. Two of them raised serious objections to any change in the personnel of the hunting party, and supplicated Jules to alter his plans, claiming they did not wish to be hampered by a lady, whose company, however charming, would mar the pleasures of the sport, as her presence would interfere with the wanton abandon that characterized a hunting party. Jules threatened to abandon the trip and so they soon withdrew their objections. A few of them, the more punctilious ones, invested in new hunting suits.

Active preparations had been going on for a week, stocking hampers, and Jules' luggage contained several bottles of geneva, his favorite beverage, and flagons of liqueur. The party included Octa, and all told, numbered five. Octa's enthusiasm had not diminished. She was flushed with happy anticipation, and a trifle nervous when they arrived at the place selected for their headquarters, the little railway station that nestled in the mountain horseshoe. But a short distance away were the mountain fastnesses. They pushed their way through leafy glades, penetrated primeval forests that resembled a pavilion or a grand cathedral, and at last reached the haunts of the deer, the lair of the bear, the den of the mountain lion, the airie of the wild hawk, conscious of the subtile air and the aroma of pine trees, and the fragrance of the wild flowers as spicy as

carnations. The grandeur of that solitude, the impressiveness of that soothing peace seemed to stay their progress. The funereal moaning of the towering trees was like the sighs of some giant being. The distant whir of the pheasant's drum echoed faintly along the mountain sides. Soon they entered the deep gloom of the forest with its vestibule of green foliage, its carpet of velvety moss. Here the band of homogeneous hunters were steeling their nerves for a thrilling encounter with a ferocious bear, and many a gaping rent in the rocks was watched with feverish solicitude. But Octa enjoyed the hunt immensely, and she was far from a novice or amateur, for she bagged three fat plump rusty looking pheasants on the first day. Jules also had been favored by good luck, for he brought down a buck deer. Each day the mountain sides revealed new vistas and wonders of scenery, each day they became more fascinated with the hunt. At last there was but one more day left. They had been in the mountains ten days, but they seemed only like so many hours. If only that day could have been spared, this narrative would never have found its way into the pages of chronicle, but we must keep pace with the story. It was the last day of the hunt, and the shrill notes from the hunter's horn echoed in the dells at the dawn of day and the party started early. When they were well up the mountain side, Jules remarked:

"Octa and I are about to go up the gulch looking for a bear or two. Claude Morton will reconnaissance at the base of the mountain and Gene and George will explore the gulch to the left, but we will all assemble on the plateau by noon."

Following out his plans, Jules with Octa as his consort, wandered up the ravine, separated from her only a few paces, looking for game of any kind, from a gray squirrel to a mountain lion. When they reached the terminus of the gulch they espied a desolate spot almost hidden by a wall of trees.

"I don't suppose the eyes of man ever gazed on this spot. I think we must be the pioneer explorers of this gulch," said Jules.

They advanced a few yards, and to their amazement beheld the ruins of a *chalet* on the side of a sharp slope. A closer inspection clearly revealed the fact that it was simply well patched up, thereby giving it the tumbled-down appearance, but that in reality it showed signs of habitation. Octa suddenly raised her right arm and pointed in the direction of the hut through an opening in the copse exclaiming:

"Why look at that strange man."

"I don't see a soul," returned Jules. "Where is the man? Your eyes must deceive you."

"Why, there near the hut."

Just then the object of her curiosity began to move a few paces and Jules exclaimed:

"Oh, yes, now I see. Come, we must move on."

But Octa remained immovable like one transfixed. He turned half way round and said sharply :

“Come, come, pay no attention to him. He is one of the natives, a rough mountain boy, who may be a robber and dangerous.”

Ah, had she but obeyed the admonition of her master in this one instance, how different would have been her life, how different her ending. Octa, in spite of Jules’ remonstrances, kept up an eye communication with the man, and before Jules knew it she had made a detour, under cover of the trees, and engaged him in conversation. Jules, a moment later, came upon the scene and admonished her. She had again given way to her foible, her insatiable thirst for conquest, but Jules was placable.

“Why,” she said, “I wanted a drink.”

“I could have procured it for you as well.

The mountain boy, for such he really was, being of youthful appearance, albeit tall and well developed, presently returned with water as clear as crystal from a spring near by, and Octa quaffed the cool sparkling water, declaring it was the most delicious drink she had ever tasted. When she returned the vessel, she said:

“You are a strange looking man. Who are you?”

“I am a mountain boy,” he said, as if proud of his home.

“But what’s your name?”

“I have none. I am all alone.”

"What is your age?"

"I do not know even that," said the boy, looking abashed at his own ignorance. "You see no one ever told me."

"Here is a dilemma. This fellow don't know his age," said Jules as he walked toward the hut. The young man did not seem to interest him.

"Is that your father?" continued the boy, pointing in the direction of Jules.

"No," said Octa, repressing a smile. "Do you live here?"

"Yes, there is my home," he said, pointing to the hut. "Would you like to see my home?" he asked, feasting his eyes upon her beauty.

"Oh, yes, I shall be very glad to see it," she replied, as her mind drew a fanciful picture of a mountaineer's home.

By this time Jules had rejoined his wife, and the trio entered the hut. The hut was a primitive looking affair, but neat and orderly, of ample size, with a partition in the middle.

"It is not a palace, but a very plain hut," said Jules, with a sneering laugh, that very much displeased Octa.

"But how picturesque," she said.

"But I have a palace, the like of which you have never seen," said the boy, as he beckoned them to follow him, while he opened a sort of door, and they entered a grand cave, lighted up with a supernatural

light. There were stalactites innumerable, and strange ornaments, a beautiful spot, with its white frosted floor, as if coated by snow, and near the centre of the cave chamber, a pretty natural fountain sent up a spray of silvery water that bewildered and amazed Octa and Jules.

After he had shown his impromptu visitors all the interesting sights, they came out again through the hut where Octa espied a bear, that sent her to one side of the cabin in terror.

"He will not harm you," said the boy, as he started to pet bruin. "He is as docile as a dog to me."

"Don't you find it lonesome here?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Then, you shall come with us. You shall see what the world is like."

"Where do you live?"

"In the city."

"But I am afraid I would not like it."

"There will be many things to interest you. Besides, if you do not like it, you can return to the mountains again."

There was a lengthy consultation between Octa and Jules. The latter opposed the rape of the mountain boy. He questioned the propriety and sapience of taking him away from his home, but she overruled him, *ad instar*.

"I will go along," he said, as Octa motioned to him. "I have only one regret, and that is my pet

bear. What will become of the animal? I cannot tell him I am going away, but I guess he will not starve."

"The bear will not miss you as much as you will miss him. His home is in the mountains," said Octa.

By this time the other members of the company came upon the scene, and the entire party with game bags full of plump looking pheasants, now proceeded to the railway station.

All went well until a train approached, when the mountain boy became frightened, and nearly made his escape, as the iron horse rushed by the station, for it was an express train that did not stop at the little mountain hamlet.

The boy remained quiet for the most part of the trip, but seemed delighted with the new sensations he was experiencing, and the strange scenes that were constantly shifting before him. He seldom took his eyes away from the car window, which afforded such a fine panorama of trees and houses flying and dancing by. He was the source of much curiosity to the passengers and attracted a great deal of attention, this picture of health and rare type of physical development. A handsome face, dark brown complexion, golden brown eyes, that seemed to laugh, but a firm face. Late in the evening they arrived at the Charter mansion. When he entered the house he did not seem bewildered at the magnificence that

surrounded him. Octa was delighted with the strange acquisition to their household.

"We will adopt him and educate him," she said, with an air of pride. The brush and towel removed the travel stains, and they were soon enroute to the dining-room, where he sat down and began to eat, disregarding the conventionalties of knife and fork; but when he saw Jules and Octa use knife and fork he quickly followed the example set, though he was quite awkward in the use of them. After dinner he played with the dog, a beautiful sleek intelligent animal, and a strong attachment sprang up between the two. For two days Jules and Octa were kept busy answering innumerable questions and explaining conditions and things about city life.

The boy was to be taught the arts of civilization by a mentor, in the person of Felix Mann, who was engaged, and he soon began to inculcate the elements of a rudimentary education upon the master, who was an apt pupil. The boy manifested great aptitude for study, and the bend of his mind was toward the student. When he became dissatisfied with his progress, kindly words of encouragement from Octa seemed to have a wonderful effect upon him, and spurred him on to greater effort. When perplexities presented themselves he came to Octa, his monitor, for decision and light.

"Did you like your mountain home?" she asked one day.

"Oh, yes, very much," he replied, as he gazed out of the window and imagined himself in his hut.

"Better than your new home?"

"Yes, in some respects."

"But you do not care to return?"

"Not now, but perhaps some day. I wish to see the world first. After I have seen it I may want to return to the mountains again. There I know happiness awaits me, happiness that I cannot find in any other place."

They often had chats about their relative stations in life. These became more delightful each day.

Early one morning the Charter household was thrown into confusion by strange noises. Every one was aroused, and Jules and the butler went through the house, and in turn woke up the boy. He listened a moment and then his face, heavy with sleep, broke into a smile, and joy lit up his face.

"Ah, it is the noise of my pet bear. How the animal discovered my locality is more than I can imagine."

Sure enough, the next morning Jules espied the bear in a clump of bushes in the yard, his eyes peering through the leaves like balls of fire. He did not wait to welcome the bear, but beat a hasty retreat into the house and summoned the boy with all possible haste. It was a curious meeting that took place between the boy and the bear. The animal jumped up, uttering short grunts, grinning with evi-

dent delight, and displaying a set of white grinders.

A few days after he had been received into the household he heard Octa playing the piano forte. He had never heard a piano in his life. He listened with rapt attention and watched her movements with great curiosity. At last he approached the instrument and kissed it. This incident conveyed to Octa the idea that he was fond of music, and she engaged a music teacher. She had formed a correct estimate of his genius, as the sequel will prove. The piano soon became his hobby. Ten hours a day were consumed in practice, and what exquisite music. Such love and devotion for the art had seldom been manifested. The music professor was astounded.

"It is phenomenal," he said to Octa. "If he keeps it up, inside of a year he will be able to teach me, and I have devoted thirteen years to the musical profession."

The piano became part of the boy's life, and he gave abundant promise of becoming a great pianist. Great things were predicted for him. His other studies were not neglected. There, also, he made rapid strides in the acquisition of an education.

"He must be baptized," said Octa one day, after it was fully known that he would remain with them. "We should give him some uncommon name."

"Well, you suggest one," said Jules, indifferently.

"Algernon."

"It is pretty, but too long. It would soon be contracted into the sobriquet of 'Al.'"

"Oh, I have it. It is pretty, very pretty. A gem of a name. Vivian."

"Vivian," said Jules, repeating the name three or four times. "I will acquiesce, if no better one occurs to me." And so this mountain boy was named Vivian, according to the rites of the Episcopal church, and his age was estimated between fifteen to twenty.

CHAPTER VII.

THREE years had settled upon the heads of the actors in this drama, and these years had brought many changes. Mr. Palass, who had been singularly exempt from personal ailments, was stricken down with apoplexy while in the harness, directing his colossal affairs. He rallied, but only to become a suffering invalid, and death came to his rescue and mowed him down *chant du cygne*. A host of afflicted relatives, a regiment of sorrowful friends followed him to the silent, sealed necropolis, amid dirges and coronals and the rites of burial, where tear-stained faces looked upon his reposeful features for the last time. A noble man had passed away, to whom History's scroll remained silent, and whose only enduring monument would be the epitaph that but feebly expressed his sterling virtues.

A second bereavement visited the family two months afterwards. Mrs. Palass followed her life companion to the city of the dead—the stygian shore. An all-wise Providence had measured the span of the life of one with that of the other, so that the sand in the hour-glass of their lives ran down nearly at the same time. They had been inseparable in life, so also they must be united in death.

Vivian had grown more handsome, and the rough

mountaineer's stamp on his face was replaced by a refined look. Octa had grown more stately and perhaps added a tithe to her entrancing beauty. Jules alone had not improved, though perhaps the least change was noticeable in him.

The gifted fingers of the musical parvenu acquired more magic each day. Already from his finger tips flowed the soul-stirring music that transported one to strange regions, and filled one with powerful emotions. The gleams of genius flashed forth and dazzled all who came under its blinding, powerful, moving spell. Manifestly this child of the mountains was destined to realize the glittering prospects of a grand artist, and verify the oft-repeated predictions of becoming the wonder of pianists. The world had never contained such a promising musical prodigy. He caressed the instrument, like a mother her babe. He communed with it, and it answered back under the touch of the master's hands. But something was disturbing the placidity of Vivian, the handsome, the idol of drawing-rooms, bringing sleepless nights to him and spreading an unhealthy pallor over his cheeks. In brief, he had been transported into a strange land, and a feeling that combined pleasure and melancholy had seized him.

"Another week has passed by and I have made no progress. I long for the opportunity to declare my love. I have been patiently watching for the time when I could breathe my love into her ears,

but it seems never to arrive," said Vivian, dismally, sighing to relieve his pent-up feelings. His was a deep, eternal love, a love, that if thwarted, ends in tragedy. Ah, but who was this creature that had entered into his existence? And why did it bring pale cheeks, and melancholy, and jealousy? Not because she did not reciprocate, for few could resist him. Ah, but she was already the wife of another.

"I believe you love nothing but music and that instrument," said Octa.

"Ah, I wish it were true for my own peace of mind, but alas my affection is not all centred on that instrument."

"So you possess another idol," she said, with an inscrutable countenance.

"Yes, you, Octa. Haven't you observed that? Perhaps I should have declared my love for you long ago, but it seemed too sacred a subject to talk about."

"Heavens, Vivian. What are you thinking about. You must refrain from such thoughts. Never mention this subject again. What would Jules say if he even suspicioned such a thing?"

"For weeks I have endeavored to suppress my love for you, but without avail. I idolize you. You have been all kindness to me. You have made me ambitious. But for you I would have returned to the mountain wilds long ago, and perhaps it

would have been better for my own peace of mind. I would not be human if I did not possess a tender heart for you."

"Remember some one else is the custodian of my affection."

"How fortunate for that one. Ah, I wish I could become the recipient of your affection."

"You are too young."

"No one knows my age. I may be forty."

"That would make you too old."

"I am exactly your age. That will make it right."

"Why do you practice so incessantly?"

"So that I may achieve fame, and become worthy of your affection. Alas I am now nobody, obscure and unhappy."

Vivian sighed heavily. His eyes shone with a brilliant lustre as they surveyed Octa.

"I must prepare for the afternoon function, so au revoir."

"Then I shall not see much of you to-day," said Vivian, casting his eyes upon the floor.

"To-day," said Octa, amused. "You have been in my company all morning. Besides I shall place a little of the afternoon at your disposal. What shall I tell the ladies about you?"

"Oh, anything."

Octa was gone, and he threw a few kisses at her as she disappeared.

Mrs. Romallard, a leading light in the local musical society, had on her calling list Mrs. Charter, and that afternoon she inflicted one of her visits upon Octa. Music furnished the leading theme for the conversation.

"Mrs. Charter," said Mrs. Romallard, at last, "is it not possible to induce Vivian to appear in public? Why not engage Concert Hall and issue a limited number of invitations. It is my opinion that you have no right to hide this man's genius any longer."

"I hope we have not been guilty of any such crime or injustice. Because a few musically inclined people are anxious to hear him, would not justify us in launching him on a professional career."

"Yes, why not?"

At this moment, Vivian, unconscious of the two ladies' presence in the drawing-room, passed through the hall, deeply absorbed in his own thoughts, and wildly swinging his long arms.

"Ah, there he is now," said Mrs. Romallard. "How handsome he is. We must ask him."

"Vivian, we wish to have a few words with you," said Octa, beckoning him.

"A great many I hope, Mrs. Charter."

A moment later Vivian stood before Mrs. Charter, his tall, lithe figure standing out in bold relief against the white, soft drawing-room walls.

"The demands for your appearance in public have

become so numerous, that we have decided to obtain your views on the subject."

"I will seize the first opportunity to show my ability. I am anxious to display my talent before a critical audience, instead of before a few people who assemble in the drawing-room, and consider themselves in duty bound to applaud my performance."

"Then your wish shall be gratified," exclaimed Mrs. Romallard. "I will consult with Monsieur Pauli, who will make all the arrangements, attend to the advertising. He has abundant experience in that line, having managed an opera house in Paris for years."

Pending the completion of the arrangements for his appearance, Vivian liberally increased the number of hours for practice. Mrs. Romallard did not have such an easy time, for Monsieur Pauli declined, with many a wave and dash of his diamond decked hand, and an occasional shrug of the shoulders. Driven to extremity, a local manager was called into requisition, and though he did not have the prestige of a foreigner, he had to answer, and he at once began to advertise the promising pianist by a liberal distribution of posters. One day Vivian was himself surprised to find his name and picture perched on tumbled-down buildings, while huge letters heralded his appearance, and as he read these announcements, a sense of his own greatness stole over him.

Back to his room he flew and practiced still more

incessantly. He regretted there was not more time to prepare for his appearance.

The day on which so much was expected of him arrived too soon. He was ill at ease and rocking with nervousness. He did not touch the instrument all day, but looked at it admiringly several times. The day dragged along wearily. Late in the afternoon he walked past Concert Hall, a gloomy, dismal looking building, and he began to speculate what the evening had in store for him, success or failure, prominence or obscurity. He pictured to himself the critical moment, and realized the awful responsibility that rested upon him. The thought of a thousand eyes being turned upon him, criticizing his boots, his hair, his shoulder, added to his nervousness.

"Did I say the eyes of a thousand auditors?" he exclaimed, laughingly to himself. "I forget there may be less than three score in the entire building, counting myself," he said, finishing his monologue.

The light dinner over, and he began preparations for the tortures of the evening. There had been no intermission in his nervousness.

"My nerves are like a gale. I cannot think of the same thing two minutes."

"That will all die away the moment you enter the stage," said Octa, by way of encouragement, for she felt he needed encouragement.

"To-night will mark a turning point in my life."

He left his own elegant apartment and sauntered

down the street with cane in hand, sometimes swinging it wildly and absent-mindedly to the imminent danger of pedestrians, and sometimes loosely dragging it along. A few friends recognized him and saluted him. From the richly furnished room into the bleak dressing room was indeed a change. The room looked unfriendly, even the walls seemed to frown down upon him and freeze his blood. He heard the first arrivals, a merry party judging from the noise. One of them whistled in mockery of his music, it seemed to him. The house was filling up rapidly, as the click of opera chairs plainly announced. He would at least be spared the humiliation of a small-sized audience, he thought. He listened to the hum of conversation, the ripple of laughter, until the time arrived for his appearance. The manager in a winsome voice aroused him from the lethargy into which he had fallen, and cautioned self-reliance and calmness. But he soon had another attack of nervousness.

"I wish I had never seen a musical instrument," he said to himself, as he made a desperate effort to compose himself. He could hear the curtain rise, and it sent a shudder through him. A cave-like silence settled itself over the house, and he found himself for the first time on a stage facing a critical audience. The ocean of faces bewildered him and he glanced around to find the piano, which stood in front of him. When he found the instrument, he re-

covered his self-possession, and darted upon the empty piano stool with the grace of a professional pianist.

One master stroke upon the clavier electrified the audience that now settled down to drink in the stream of delightful music, and when he stopped a storm of applause went up. A huge bouquet, carried by two men, was conveyed upon the stage, the contribution of admiring ladies.

Nothing but praise and applause greeted him. The select and fashionable audience became enthusiasm mad. The name of Vivian traveled from mouth to mouth. Flattering offers from enterprising managers were some of the sequels of his successful appearance. He was with difficulty induced to accept one. Octa herself urged him to embrace the rare opportunity, and for a good reason. She too felt she could not resist Vivian's onslaught, and his absence might at least delay if not avert an alienation of her affection. At last he accepted, but he was not sanguine of success.

"It may end in dismal failure. I am not at all certain of success. My local reputation has not yet preceded my appearance in distant lands, the far east."

Octa and Vivian, a few days before his departure, employed themselves in making farewell calls and empty promises to each other. Vivian was still perturbed about his acceptance of the offer, as it would separate him from her.

"By the time you return you will be cured of your infatuation," she told him.

"No, never," he replied.

Before his final departure, he again benignly thanked them for their interest in him.

"Perhaps I may never return. No one can tell what may happen. I again thank you for elevating me from my humble station."

Both Octa and Jules resumed their canonical existence, but took a deep interest in his career and it proved a successful tour, as many had predicted, and as newspaper clippings, which he enclosed with his letters, abundantly proved. All his letters, of which there were many, were addressed to Octa, and she never allowed Jules to read them, but she would peruse them aloud to him, omitting the most affectionate parts. It happened one day that Jules came across one of Vivian's letters.

"I see Vivian is rather affectionate toward you, my dear. It seems to me he uses most too endearing expressions."

"The dear fellow is just like my own child. Of course it is my fault, or rather ours, we have petted him too much. He looks upon me as his mother. You must consider he is an orphan, but he is covering himself with glory, a marvelous and brilliant man."

And so the unsuspecting Jules thought no more of his wife's approval of Vivian's affectionate man-

ner and strange actions, dismissed his suspicions and relaxed his weak vigilance.

What ranked as an important event in the Charter family was the arrival of a healthy bantling, some months after Vivian's departure, and Jules was doubly proud because the bairn was a robust boy. A pretty brat with large eyes and dimpled cheeks.

"It is a lucky acquisition," said Jules, to one of his personal friends. "The little fellow will keep us together, will strengthen the bond of affection between us."

Vivian was greatly missed. There seemed to be a void in the family circle, and when at last they received word from him that the tour was drawing to a close, they were much delighted at the prospect of soon seeing him again. His room in the Charter mansion was placed in trim, beautified by a sprinkling of flowers and floral decorations, where garlands and mottoes were symbols of cult. A welcome home party had been arranged to receive him, and pay homage to the genius of this musical prodigy.

His eastern success had not detracted from his personal charms nor worn away his modesty. He announced his intention of resting one year from his labors before accepting any engagements. One or two theatrical managers sent opportunizing agents, and one manager came to California personally. Vivian remained obdurate.

"Why," said the manager, with an appealing smile,

"you have created a furore, and under my management, you will tour the states this season, and next year you will be the sensation of Europe, and then back to the states again."

"I reject your magnificent offer, nevertheless. I must expand my knowledge of music," replied Vivian, contumeliously.

And so the interview ended, on one side a disconsolate and disappointed manager, on the other a careless genius.

Vivian, unrestrained, flitted about the house at his own free will, one moment in his own apartment, the next in the drawing-room; two minutes at the piano and then two in the garden, among the plants and flowers, happy as a school boy on a vacation.

"It seems so delightful to breathe the atmosphere that surrounds the spot one is permitted to call home," he soliloquized, as he contemplated his environments, as if renewing old friendship with a piece of furniture or a choice plant.

Octa and Vivian spent much of their time in each other's society, indulging in little outings, for he had fascinated her as no other man had ever done, while Jules filled the rôle of marionette.

One day, about two months after Vivian's return, Jules had taken his departure for the office after the customary farewell that Vivian so often envied. Octo and Vivian were all alone in that huge mansion, as they had often been, with all day before

them, with nothing to disturb their indoor life except an occasional caller.

"You saw many pretty ladies on your tour."

"None so fair as you. In all the land I traveled, on railway cars, in audiences, in drawing-rooms, I saw none to compare with you."

"I had supposed that one so absorbed in music as you, would be oblivious to them, or not even find time to learn the art of flattery."

"*They* are always so much in evidence, one cannot ignore them, and what you term flattery is unknown to me. But what have you done with the love letters I sent you?"

"I have preserved them. Why did you write them?"

"I could not help myself. You would appear before me during a concert, while I was at the instrument, and the audience would applaud my performance whenever I thought of you. At first it alarmed me, but I concluded it was because I played better when I thought of you."

Vivian sighed, and seizing hold of her hand began to pour forth his affection, speaking with emotional accents of his undying devotion. But Octa turned a deaf ear to his pleadings.

"Listen," he exclaimed, in a high key.

"I will listen, but you will accomplish nothing."

"Jules must not keep us separated any longer. You are not happy. But I can make you happy."

Come what may, I shall never cease to love you. Your voice, your manner, your beauty have fascinated me. One word from you I prize more than volumes from others. Come, we must flee."

"Where to?"

"To the mountains. They will never look for us there. We will be secluded, concealed from the world and mankind."

"But my husband, my child, my name."

"I hope I am dearer than all those."

"You do not understand. I cannot transfer my love to some one else at will. If I should still love you at the end of a year, then I will listen to you, perhaps."

"Then you love me, just what that something told me, prompted me you did. Now is the time. Wait a year? Never. Not one day even. You shall be mine henceforth."

"I must have time to study it over," she gasped, pushing him aside.

"I will give you five minutes; when I return you must give me your answer."

Vivian departed, stroking his raven hair with his hand until his head looked like a ball covered with mirrors. His footsteps died away. She was all alone. She reviewed her past, and weighed the future. She recalled advice from her parents and friends, and studied over Vivian's startling proposition.

"Ah," she exclaimed, lifting up her head, as if a vision had appeared before her. "I am in this man's power. He loves me, he is intelligent to a high degree. His society is an intellectual treat. If Jules were half as refined. But yet I cannot accept Vivian. It would be terrible. My name, that which has never been stained by the breath of scandal. No, it must not be. I would rather die. If I could only flee away from this man's power."

Only the thickness of one room separated the two. Vivian was revolving the matter over and over again. He had scruples, but they were not strong enough.

"What will Jules think of me? What will the world say? But I am in her power. She controls me. She is to blame, not I. The time is up. She expects me."

She could hear his footsteps. He was returning. She would make one more plea. When he entered the room he found her in tears. She thought tears might move him when words would be futile.

"Well I have returned for the answer," he said, placing his hand under her chin to pry up her head.

"It is not ready. Do not think any more of the matter. Dismiss it," she said, turning her head to one side to avoid his eyes that had often proven his most powerful argument.

"I must have your answer."

"Then I will answer you now. I cannot go with you."

"You will wreck me. You shall never see me again. This is my last day on earth."

"One moment. Do not be rash."

"Without you I have nothing to live for. By heavens you must go. There is no escape. Come, come. You secretly hate Jules. Then away from him. You must go ; you must say yes."

"I will go. But my child I must take it with me."

"No, no, the child must remain here. It is better off here."

"Oh save me, some one save me. Why did I say yes?"

"Henceforth you are all mine," said Vivian, dancing with glee. "We must hasten and flee to the mountain to-day, this very minute. It will be our pelladium."

"No, no, not to-day. I must see my husband again. I must look into his eyes once more. I must take a mental farewell of him."

"Impossible. Do not delay. He may be on his way home now. It must be now or never. So send the nurse with the child to some friend's house, with instructions not to return until late, and when she is gone, we will pack our belongings and take the train, and say farewell to the world."

The nurse was instructed to call on a friend in a

distant part of the city, and both proceeded hurriedly to pack trunks and valises.

"What time does the train depart?" asked Octa, despairingly.

"In one hour."

"Pack two trunks in an hour? Impossible."

"You cannot take along more than one."

"I cannot store half my things into one and I cannot come back."

"I will help you."

There was much confusion in the Charter mansion. But it was not until an express wagon rolled up and took two trunks away, that the neighbors began to crowd up to the windows. And their wonder was increased, when they saw Mrs. Charter gowned in a gray traveling suit, come out of the house followed by Vivian. They were off. She to exchange the luxury of drawing-rooms and downy couches for the accommodations of a rough mountain cabin. He to exchange the life of a genius, full of honor, the recipient of plaudits of the multitude, the easy life of the polished gentleman, the rage of the fair sex, for the mountain wilds. He had pandered to her foibles, had woven his panegyric net around her, and lariat-ed her by his polish.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was the day before the patriotic Fourth of July, the day which is held in such high veneration in America. Jules was preëminently happy. He had already decided on an outing for his family, and he had included Vivian in his calculations. Jules entered the mansion at the usual hour and at the usual place. He encountered no one in the hallway, and he began to imagine that something was amiss. He went from one place to another, but the house seemed completely deserted. He furthermore found it in a state of great disorder, bureau drawers were gaping open, while papers and articles of wearing apparel were strewn on the carpets. He went first into Octa's room, and there found a melancholy billet in Octa's handwriting. Its fatal contents were as follows:

"When you find this note I will have entered on a long journey, in company with some one whom I sincerely love and I have been a victim to his power and influence. You have been a kind and good husband, better than I deserve, but I could not wrest myself away from this man's power. Do not try and find me. Should you succeed it would only humiliate me. I hope you will forgive me. Of all men I have ever known I find it the most difficult to disappoint you.

Affectionately,

"OCTA."

"A note of cajolement," he exclaimed, as he tore the slip of paper into a hundred shreds. "Who has robbed me of my wife? Who is this man she loves better than any one else?"

Jules was not prepared for this terrible shock. His hands trembled, his legs quaked, his head grew dizzy. He put his hands to his forehead to steady himself. Tears nearly came to his eyes. She had abjured him at the price of pride, wealth and station.

Jules' troubles were beginning to multiply. That which he had been trying to avert had come to pass too soon. He had always been afraid her beauty would be the target for some men to try and win her from him. His idol was shattered and lay in fragments before him, but yet he loved the wreck. His heart was sad and heavy. What now were the fruits of his toil and moil to him, his home, this wealth, this mammon he had been struggling to acquire, *embarras de richesse* as valueless as dust to him now. It was some time before he recovered, and then he burst into a fit of rage. Again he asked of the walls the name of the man who had robbed him of his wife, his happiness. But no answer. Up to this time Vivian had been precluded from his thoughts. To even think of him as abetting, or aiding his wife and her paramour seemed diabolical. But yet Vivian was not about, though that was nothing strange, for he used to be away two or three days at a

time, without even giving an account of himself, and they all supposed he had made a trip to the mountains. At last he flew to Vivian's rooms, and he entered the apartments breathlessly. There was the same disorder, the floor littered with paper, neckties, clothes, boxes, evidences of a hasty departure and no sign of Vivian. At last it occurred to him that they had fled together. It seemed impossible, yet there was abundant evidence. Whither had they gone, where could he find them? A further search revealed the fact that the nurse and child were also missing. The entire family had abstracted itself. He was thankful they had not taken the mansion—robbed him of his home. The nurse and child soon returned, much to Jules' comfort. They would throw a little light on the mystery, he thought. In fact the child was a little salve for his wounded heart. She would return to see the child. No mother could leave her offspring in that manner. The nurse threw up her hands in horror, when she heard of the missing mother.

“Oh, she told me to take the baby to Hollingers, as the misses there was so fond of the baby. She told me I need be in no hurry to return, as she would be making a number of calls that afternoon, and would not be home until late in the evening. Who would have supposed she would leave here? Such a grand place and such a kind, good husband.”

"But tell me, were her actions not suspicious. Did you notice anything strange about her behavior?"

"Nothing, whatever," pleaded the nurse. "She acted the same as usual."

"As usual?"

"She and Vivian were very friendly. You must have known that. I believe they must have gone together. I never trusted that man."

"Friendly, but not more so than usual."

"They were nearly always together, in the garden, or in the drawing-room."

After dinner Jules managed to gather around him an air of calmness. "I will not permit them to have their own way. I will have them tracked down. They shall not escape me. I will find their hiding place. They shall pay dearly for this. And this Vivian! What gratitude. He has paid the debt he owes me for accomplishing his amelioration by stealing my wife."

This kind-hearted, benevolent man, suddenly changed and became suspicious of everybody and everything. As a gust of passion swept over him he walked up and down the room, muttering curses, billingsgate, heaping vituperation upon the destroyer of his happiness, through his set, grinding teeth.

"Vivian, the poltroon!!! the viper, peccant!
* * * * * whelp, runnion. Perfidy. Fire and brim-
stone * * * * * Sirrah!!!"

Though robbed of his wife, friends came to offer

sympathy and consolation, and lighten the burden of sorrow and scandal. Claude Morton, who had earned for himself the sobriquet of Woman Hater, though the steadfast friend of Jules, came to advise and chide him.

"It serves you right. I told you you would regret it. Ah, you did not heed my warning. This is what you get."

"It's what I haven't got that worries me," replied Jules.

"I mentioned to you that the great difference in your ages would be a yawning chasm which would lead to constant disagreements, if not separation. Now see the position you are in. Think of the scandal, the disgrace. I would not turn a hand to get her back. If she does return send her out again. The same thing will happen again if she returns."

"I will give her one week in which to return, nevertheless," replied Jules.

But that time was extended from week to week. In the meantime Jules breakfasted and dined in that huge dining-room solitary and alone, sometimes calling the chef into the room to break the unbearable solitude. Jules had in contemplation breaking up the domestic life and closing up the house, but some powerful influence seemed to restrain him.

CHAPTER IX.

OCTA and Vivian were safe in the mountain wilds, the scene of their first meeting, hunting and fishing, roving about and leading an ideal mountaineer's life in this Arcadia, amid Nature's wonders and picturesqueness. These were halycon days, *summum bonum*. She was far happier in the mountain than in her city palace, yet there was something disturbing her serenity, and that was the absent child. She had only a picture of the bantling, and that she carried in a locket fastened around her neck with a gold chain.

"Oh, my child, my own precious child, that beautiful boy, dearer than all the world to me, separated from me? It is impossible to live without him. I must have the child with me. If I do not obtain possession of him insanity will overtake me," pleaded Octa, weeping in the corner of the hut.

"There is but one way to procure the child and that is by abduction, and I swear I will set about to accomplish it."

"And leave me here alone in these mountain wilds? No, no, I would accompany you."

"That would lead to detection, arrest, and expose us to the wrath of Jules Charter, and our separation would inevitably result. I can make the trip in one day."

"That is impossible, but I cannot remain here alone over night. It would be more than could be

expected of me. I could summon enough fortitude to remain alone during the day, but at night, never. Besides, what would happen to me if you were apprehended and cast into prison. I would starve in the mountains."

"Perhaps, after all, you could accompany me."

"Yet that seems like taking too much risk."

Their attention was presently diverted into some other channel, and they pursued their rugged existence cheerfully, save that she felt the absence of the child keenly. Vivian was profuse in his promises to procure the child for her. He busied himself with preparations, and early the next morning went about to fix up a concoction, which he calculated administering to her, and which would keep her in a comatose condition until he could return from his kidnaping expedition. Long before she was awake he boiled leaves from a peculiar tree, and poured the liquid into the coffee that he was in the habit of bringing her every morning.

"Drink the coffee and then sleep as long as you desire. When you awake I will have a surprise for you."

"Do not leave me alone," she said, sleepily, at the same time reaching out her hand to hold him, but sleep shifted her into dreamland again, and she was powerless to intervene. He kissed her, and then darted down the mountain side, deeply absorbed in the work he had set out to perform. And it occurred to him that if success crowned his efforts to

kidnap the child, its safety would by no means be insured. It would be extremely difficult and hazardous for him to have exclusive charge of the tiny baby on the journey back to the mountains. He had almost reached the little station, when he decided to return. Up the mountain side he labored, and when he reached the hut it was with great difficulty that he aroused her, luckily the concoction had not yet taken effect, as he discovered he had made a mistake and had given her an overdose.

"I have matured my plans for the abduction, but I find I need assistance. I have decided you shall accompany me. We will both disguise ourselves."

"But we must not be seen together in public in the city even in disguise."

"That can all be arranged."

So they made preparations to leave on the morrow, and early the next morning they set out, speculating on the success of the expedition. Disguised like rough frontier folks, they presented an odd appearance. They reached the little station half an hour before the arrival of the train, and the doughty station master never lost an opportunity to look at the couple and ponder over their oddity. At last the panting train drew up to the station with a noisy shriek, and they climbed on board. The train sped on and he became reminiscent.

He remembered his first trip and he went carefully over his career. He recalled how he practiced

and accused himself for not devoting more time to practice. He recalled how he electrified his first audience, and how he followed up his success in eastern cities. Ah, if it had not been for her he would be playing in Europe, before crowned heads, perhaps the most famous pianist in all the world. Ah, but he preferred her to glory, to everything.

The shades of night were falling fast when they reached the city, and as she shaded her eyes and gazed out of the windows and saw the lights shining radiantly on hilltops and in the valleys of a great city, she longed for a brief period to return to that life which she had voluntarily left behind. Vivian after ensconcing her at one of the hotels, made his way to the Palace mansion. A light shone brilliantly from a window upstairs. He took up a position on the opposite side of the street. The big mansion seemed deserted, save for that one light. At last the light was extinguished and he saw the huge door swing open and a man walk down the steps, he heard the ferrule of the man's heavy cane grinding on the pavement. It was Jules Charter. He emerged from his hiding place and followed the man, so closely that he could place his hands upon his shoulder. He had satisfied himself that it was the grief stricken Jules, and for a moment he felt like delivering to him the treasure he had stolen. But he soon became himself again, the fiend overpowered the finer feelings that at times predominated the

man. With many a *coup-d'oeil* to the right and left, in front and behind, he retraced his steps to the house. He mounted the familiar front steps and inserted the slender key he still retained in his possession, and opened the door noiselessly. The hall girandole cast a dim light about the foot of the grand staircase, but everything wore a familiar appearance, the highly ornamented hat rack still adorned the hall, and there was apparently no change in that orderly mansion since the time he had the distinction of being a dweller therein. He halted often and anon to listen, but all was quiet. He proceeded stealthily to the nursery, his shadow silhouetted against the wall. He thought he heard some one breathe and it chilled him. He went to the door and glued his ear to the keyhole. There was no noise. He had by this time fully determined on entering and kidnapping the child from the nursery. He tried the door, but it was securely locked and he possessed no key. He was baffled, and stole noiselessly out of the house without encountering any one. Being fatigued, he proceeded to the hotel where Octa patiently awaited him, and she was in turn disappointed because his search and prowls for the child had been futile.

Early the next morning he engaged a carriage, and accompanied by Octa drove in the vicinity of the Charter mansion. He deserted the carriage at the corner, and left instructions with the driver to

be constantly on the alert and prepared to bear him rapidly away at a moment's notice, as soon as he saw him approach. Vivian remained in the vicinity of the house for some time, and after a time saw Jules again leave the house, suspecting nothing, for he did not even look at the carriage across the road in which Octa was sitting and watching, nor did he look at Vivian. Jules disappeared around a corner, and Vivian waited until ten o'clock, when his patience was rewarded by catching a glimpse of the nurse in the yard. He watched her coming through the gate and saw her wheel the baby up the street. He distinctly recognized the nurse as he studied every movement made by her and beheld the awry face. He looked intently up and down the thoroughfare, but no one was in sight. The opportunity had arrived, and he stealthily followed the nurse, cut the strap with the knife which he carried in his belt, took the baby in his arms without uttering a sound. The nurse, however, made a determined resistance and seized hold of him, but he pushed her aside. She screamed at the top of her voice, but no rescue came, not even a window was opened in the neighborhood. Vivian dashed to the carriage standing at the corner, jumped in and was off before the astonished nurse recovered from her fright.

"The darling treasure," said Octa, reaching for the baby, who smiled as he looked up in his mother's face. "Thank you. How kind of you."

Vivian nodded approval, though he was scarcely

conscious of Octa's presence, so absorbed was he in making his escape. Away to the depot the carriage rolled, but not too swiftly for Vivian, who knew not a minute must be lost to reach the depot in time for the train. A minute wasted might cost him his freedom. A few minutes more and the train would be on its way to the mountain home. Not a moment must be lost. The carriage at last came to a stop, and they were in front of the depot. The gong was sounding the last warning, the locomotive's bell was tolling, and Vivian made a wild rush for the gate to hold it open until Octa should be able to reach it. The depot master growled, but the gate was held open until they were safely inside. They were not interrupted on their journey, except a few passengers eyed them suspiciously. Late in the evening they reached the little mountain halmet. The little fellow had behaved admirably on the way, never even as much as uttering a sound. When they alighted at the station, Vivian was afraid the alarm had spread, and they would be under surveillance, but no one seemed to be interested in them, and they remained in the town over night, and made arrangements for the subsistence of the child. The next morning they made their way up the mountain side. Octa was fatigued, but happy in the contemplation that her child had been restored to her. She could now guard over the little fellow, and count on his companionship when Vivian was away procuring game and fish for their tables.

CHAPTER X.

THE day on which the great crime was committed, the abduction, that hung more weights on to the heart strings of Jules, had opened majestically, assuring Vivian that the child would be given an airing. The nurse had been busy all morning, preparing the child for the wanton outing. She was proud of the child, and took an unusual interest in the boy. A new dress that robed him for the first time, created consternation in the child's mind, and he rebelled against the stiff, suffocating material. He was finally pacified, and placed in the carriage that presently rolled along the garden paths lined with shrubbery, and started slowly up the street, the tiny shadow of the boy creeping along the iron railing. Suddenly the demon-like figure of Vivian brushed past the nurse and seized the boy, like an eagle its helpless prey. The nurse started to give Vivian chase, but the fleet-footed child robber was giving a good account of himself, and had covered a block by the time she had arrived at a decision. When she saw his fading form, with the white garment of the child fluttering above his shoulder, bounding around the corner, she gave up the idea of pursuit in despair.

When she recovered somewhat from her dazed condition, she put the empty baby vehicle into the

house and then started to give the alarm. First of all she thought of notifying Jules; but whether it was on account of her German phlegmatic composition, or the dispensation of natural stupidity, or both, she had remained ignorant of Jules' down town address, though she had been in the employ of the Charter family approximately three years. Then at the expenditure of much time and energy, she ransacked the neighborhood for a police officer, and by noon time she had been successful, thanks to a false alarm of an attempted assassination that drew the police from their rendezvous, but she was still so excited that it required the intelligence of two municipal peace guardians to unravel her story.

It was late in the afternoon by the time the news had penetrated the cordon of police attaches and reached headquarters, and instructions were sent out to apprehend the kidnapper, actually on the same day the crime was committed.

When Jules returned in the afternoon, the nurse met him in the doorway weeping, the picture of despair, the arrangement of her hair wrecked, her eyes red like the rising sun, her voice throttled by emotion.

"They have stolen little Arthur," she said between her sobs.

"What," cried Jules, dropping his cane and opening his eyes until nothing but the whites was displayed in them.

"Yes, he is gone. I had just started to give him

the usual morning air, when a man snatched him from the carriage and ran off with him."

"Who was it? Tell me all. Now sit down and compose yourself," but Jules was nearly as excited as the nurse.

"I don't know. He was disguised."

Jules mopped the perspiration from his forehead while waiting for the nurse to collect her scattered thoughts; in the meantime he filled up the gap by upbraiding her.

"Why did you let them take him? He was under your protection. Were you at the carriage when he was stolen? He was all the world to me."

"I was pushing the carriage, and Arthur looked so happy. I shall never forget that beautiful child. I was powerless, helpless. I was no match for the man, besides it was done so quickly there was no time to call for assistance, though I screamed lustily, and offered resistance. He stole up behind me and pounced upon the boy, and made rapidly away with him. I sprang at the man, but he pushed me aside and ran, and I saw him disappear around the corner of the street. It all happened in less time than I can tell it."

For nearly half an hour Jules listened patiently to her disconnected account, asking numerous questions, to satisfy himself that she was not implicated in the abduction, as an abettor, or for a money consideration.

"It is the work of Vivian. The arch fiend, though I had not supposed he was in this part of the country. Oh, will not some one deliver him into my power? Will not some day see him falling into my hands?"

Jules dismissed the nurse, and locked himself into his room to mourn for those who had been nearest and dearest to him. With the theft of the child, the last shred of hope that she would return was dissipated. He must forget her. She had remained away too long to make it possible for a reconciliation. Yet he would like to look upon her face once more, but he could not trust himself, his fearful temper, the injury that had been inflicted upon him, the wound in his pride, would be sufficient cause for him to avenge himself. His life was ruined, why should she not pay with her life? A life for a life. After a time he recovered from his murderous inclinations.

"The loss of the child is the severest blow of all. I will spend thousands of dollars to recover little Arthur. I will search every nook and corner of the globe to find the boy."

The small family circle had been gradually, but surely reduced, until no one except Jules was left, so he peremptorily decided to close up the mansion. To his delight the apartments that sheltered him when he first lived in California were tenantless, and Jules again became wedded to them, and about all that now appealed to his fancy was the marine view,

all else seemed a hollow mockery, an empty show, filled with deceit.

“History has repeated itself at least in my case. After five years of a checkered career I am back where I started, but with a great deal more experience, a great deal more.”

“The scene of beauty and delight is changed :
No roses bloom upon my fading cheek,
No laughing graces wanton in my eyes ;
But haggard Grief, lean-looking sallow Care,
And pining Discontent, a rueful train
Dwell on my brow, all hideous and forlorn.”

Rowe.

The promises of the detectives remained unredeemed, but Jules had not given up hopes. Deep lines began to settle on his face, the footprints of bitter grief. His head was bowed down with sorrow. If the stamp of gloom on his brow was a fac simile of the gloom within him, his sorrow was indeed great. His walk was wavering, his steps uncertain. He must have a diversion. Anything to take his mind off the subject that was haunting him. So with a trusty companion, he proceeded to the mountains to indulge in his favorite sport, the hunt, the chase, or what you may choose to call it. They wandered about the mountains for a week, and at last came to a spot that seemed familiar. It was the glade in the gulch that afforded a glimpse of the hut where the destroyer of his happiness had once lived. He con-

templated the hut from a distance, and again went over the drama that had but so recently been enacted. He approached it, drawn on by some invisible influence, and the place brought up unpleasant memories. He listened and thought he heard voices. Suddenly the music of a piano greeted his ears. "What, a piano in a hut in this wilderness!" He sat down and listened. Slowly the mystery began to unfold itself before him.

"That music explains all. It is Vivian's playing. Here is where they are secluded. At last their hiding place is found, but I will break up their little romance. I shall come between them, as Vivian came between us. They shall now pay the debt of the transgressors."

That exquisite music identified the master. It echoed in the woods and filled the glen with melody. He entered noiselessly through the partially open door, and there was Octa with her back toward the door, her hair wonderfully arranged, a caricature of what it had once been, and he could catch a glimpse of Vivian's profile, sharp and noble.

Jules stood there for a moment like one transfixed, but slowly coming to a decision. He could scarcely believe his own eyes, and it was with difficulty that he persuaded himself that it was not a vision. He listened to the master's touch. The intricate trills, the wild dashes pierced his ears, as Vivan's bony hands danced upon the ivory keys like skeletons.

Suddenly the music died away, the instrument became mute. Vivian arose to his full height directly, his head almost touching the ceiling, and cast a few affectionate glances at Octa, and then looked in the direction of the door with his penetrating eyes and beheld Jules, whose presence visibly startled him. Vivian advanced, greeting the intruder cordially, and extending his hand.

“Ah, my dear Mr. Charter. Let me welcome you to our humble home. You are my benefactor. To you I owe everything.”

“Yes, but with what ingratitude you have compensated me.”

Octa now advanced, threw her arms around Jules' neck and kissed him. This was too much for Jules, this pleonasm of affection. It carried him back to the courtship, the honeymoon. It had saved her life.

“My dear Jules. I hope you will forgive me. Do not use violence, I pray of you, for my sake condone us.”

“But Octa, my dear Octa, you will kill me. This is no place for you. Come with me. Restore my happiness. If you decline to return with me you shall die.”

Vivian returned to the piano and played unconcernedly, drowning their words. He did not know of the threat that Jules had made.

Octa had slipped upon her knees and was sobbing bitterly.

"Yes, Jules, I will return, if you will forgive me and promise me that you will never mention or refer to the past."

"I will forgive you since you are penitent."

"But Vivian must not be molested."

"No harm shall come to him at my hands. But we must hasten and go home to-day."

"Jules, it is strange that you should come to-day. We had made preparations to leave to-morrow for South America, where Vivian is already billed to appear," she said, in an undertone.

"Providence must have directed my steps hither."

Vivian still played on, but thinking of something far different than the music he was producing; at last he stopped, and Jules told him of Octa's decision.

"If that is your wish you can go. But one moment. You shall taste some of my mountain tea. It will refresh you for your trip to the station."

"Yes," said Octa, "he makes excellent tea."

Before Jules assented, Vivian disappeared and was absent for some time. Jules entertained Octa with news about her friends, or a train of reminiscences of their former life. After a long time he reappeared with two tiny cups of steaming tea in his hands, aromatic tea, made from a berry that grows in the mountains. He set the tea on top of the piano, and enjoined them to partake of it. Then he disappeared. Jules arose from the rustic chair, leaned over and kissed Octa, and then reached for a cup of the tea

nearest to him and passed it to Octa, who drank it down slowly. Jules then took the other cup and drank it also, commenting on its flavor. No sooner had Octa finished her tea, when she yawned and exclaimed, drowsily :

“I am getting so sleepy that I cannot keep awake,” and started for a cot covered with furs, and as soon as she reached it she sank down upon it with a moan, which Jules supposed was due to mental anguish.

Jules watched her as she closed her eyes. Vivian had not yet returned. Jules, considerate as ever, remained quiet for a while, only thinking that Octa wished to take a short nap before starting. Conceiving that it was time to start, he approached the primitive lounge and made an attempt to arouse her. He noticed a little foam had gathered around her pretty lips, but she did not seem to be breathing, and when he gently touched her forehead there was no response. He seized hold of her, shook her violently, but she did not stir.

“I believe she is dying,” exclaimed Jules, growing pale and scrutinizing her pallid features for a sign of life. Vivian reappeared with ruffled hair and a marble countenance.

“Vivian, you have poisoned her,” said Jules, pointing to the couch.

“It is not true. I revere her. How could it be possible for me to harm her. I would as soon inflict injuries upon myself. Have no fear. She will soon

be herself again. The tea has acted as a narcotic. It has that effect upon her when her nerves are at a high tension."

Vivian bade Jules to remain in the cabin, promising to return soon, and then he disappeared for the second time. Jules placed little faith in Vivian's explanation. He placed his hand on her forehead. It was growing cold.

"The doctor may yet save her," he exclaimed, as he dashed out of the cabin down the mountain side. He fairly flew and nearly met with a terrible accident that might have cost him his life. A precipice was in his path, and in his haste he nearly lept over it. It was not long before he reached the little hamlet, and darted into a physician's office. He quickly related the object of his mission, and the necessity for extreme haste. He suggested to the doctor the advisability of being mounted as quickly as possible.

"But, my good man, I do not know the way. Where is the cabin?"

"By the time you are in your saddle, I will be mounted myself, and on hand to show you the way."

Before the doctor had found and prepared his medicine case and ordered his horse to the front door, Jules rode up to the physician's office on a horse he had procured from the village tavern close at hand, and the two started for the oblique hillsides amid a cloud of fulvous dust.

Vivian, in one appalling moment realized the enormity of the mistake that had been made, and how the fair Octa instead of the chosen Jules had drained the fatal contents. Folding his hands archly above her forehead, he regarded her sorrowfully with bleeding heart, while the color fled from his bronzed face, and then he exclaimed in a voice stifled with poignant emotion :

“My God, she has been slain with my own hands. Even death cannot separate us. I must follow her in death as I followed her in life, I cannot live without her. With her departed life is nothing to me. I have lost her forever.”

He heard the metallic clatter of horse's hoofs break into the cabin, and appropos prepared a cup of poison to sweep away his own miserable life that had now become heavy and burdensome. He uttered a brief but fervent prayer for the repose of his soul, for the expiation of his crime. The scenes and incidents of his life flashed before him like an illuminated procession. As his lips touched the green glossy looking liquid, it sent a shudder through him. It blinded him, staggered him, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he made his way into the cavern, where he crept into a subterranean chamber, which was to be his sepulchre, where his bones were to gather the mould of centuries unmolested.

Non semper erit æstas. Here to-day and gone to-morrow.

Passed from the living into his tomb prematurely. A life so full of promises thrown away. The brief reign of his genius was over, and those few who had become intimately acquainted with him, declared that they had never associated with a more charming person.

Jules and the doctor, in the interim, had reached the cabin, dismounted and proceeded within, and there on the cot she lay, just as Jules had left her, beautiful as ever. The smile on her face had not even expired. Jules saw yet a glimmer of hope—*nil desperandum*. “She only sleeps,” he said, his eyes still fixed upon her. He awaited the doctor’s decision with intense anxiety. It needed but a moment for the doctor to reach a decision that meant so much for Jules.

“Life has been extinct for at least an hour. There is evidence of poisoning,” said the physician, dropping his hands to his side like a semaphore.

“Doctor you did not know her in life, or else you could fathom my sorrow. What a wealth of beauty and love she possessed.” Jules turned his face from the doctor and looked out of the cabin door.

The doctor became seated on the rude chair, as his interest became more and more rivetted on her strange career, which Jules was unfolding, while the tears, in spite of himself, came unbidden to his eyes.

They searched the hut and the cave, but could find no trace of the erring Vivian. He had myste-

riously disappeared. His hiding place was secure. Jules found the boy still asleep in a corner of the cabin, where Octa pointed him out as he entered, sleeping on unconscious of the loss of his mother.

And on the mountain side where the wild flowers grow, where the shadows of primeval trees shift and billow, wrapped in cerements, she found peace, and a noble mausoleum marks the spot to this day, records her obit, *in memoriam*. A few sapplings chafe against the iron fence that surrounds the monument, and supports a cobweb of woodbine. Each year Jules and the boy pay a visit to the lonely mountain spot, and reverently reposit garlands of roses upon the little mound that is now covered by a blanket of velvety moss,—*finis coronat opus*.

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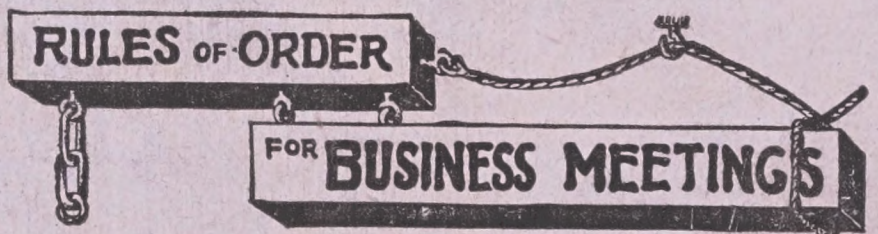
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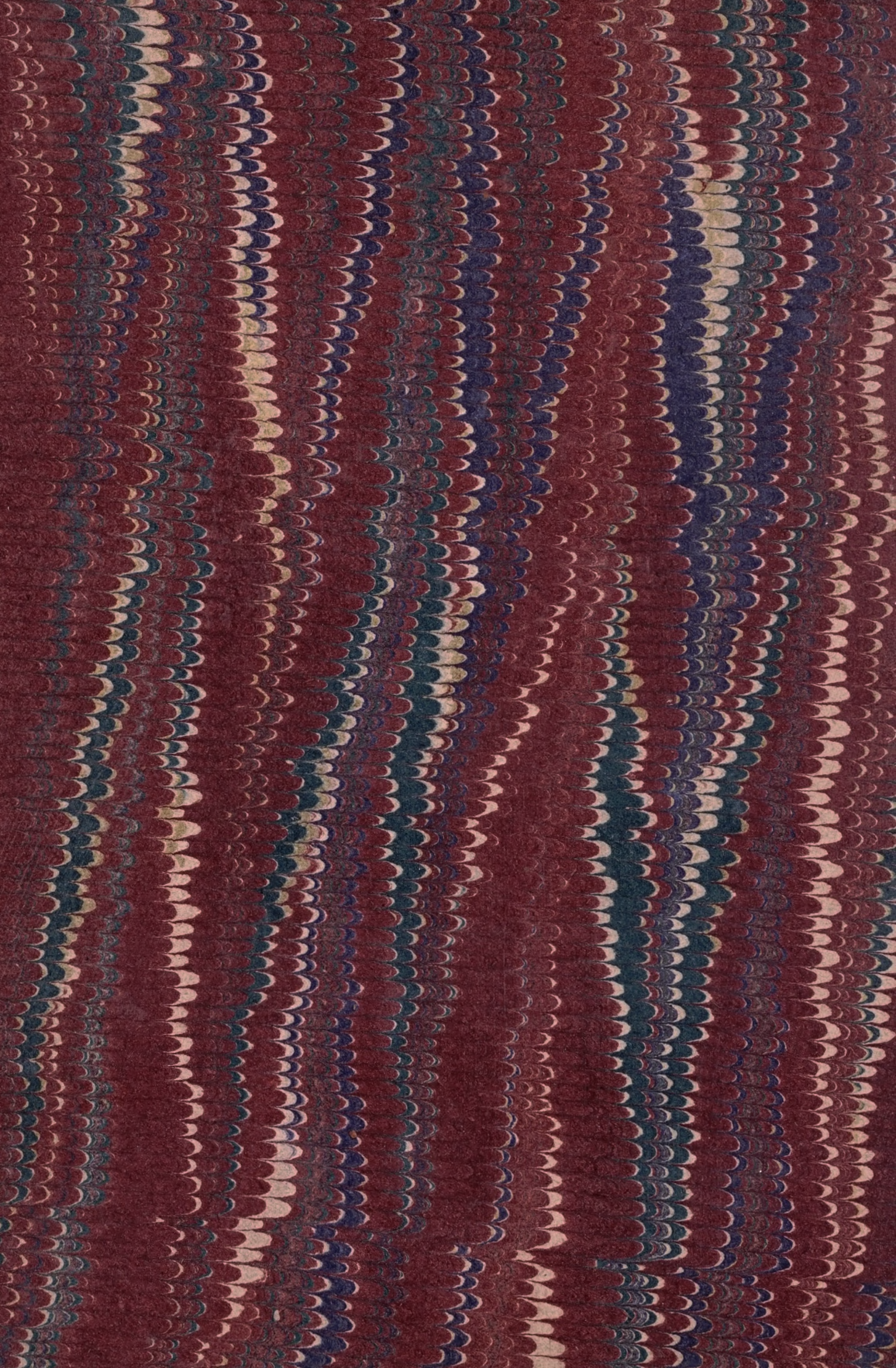
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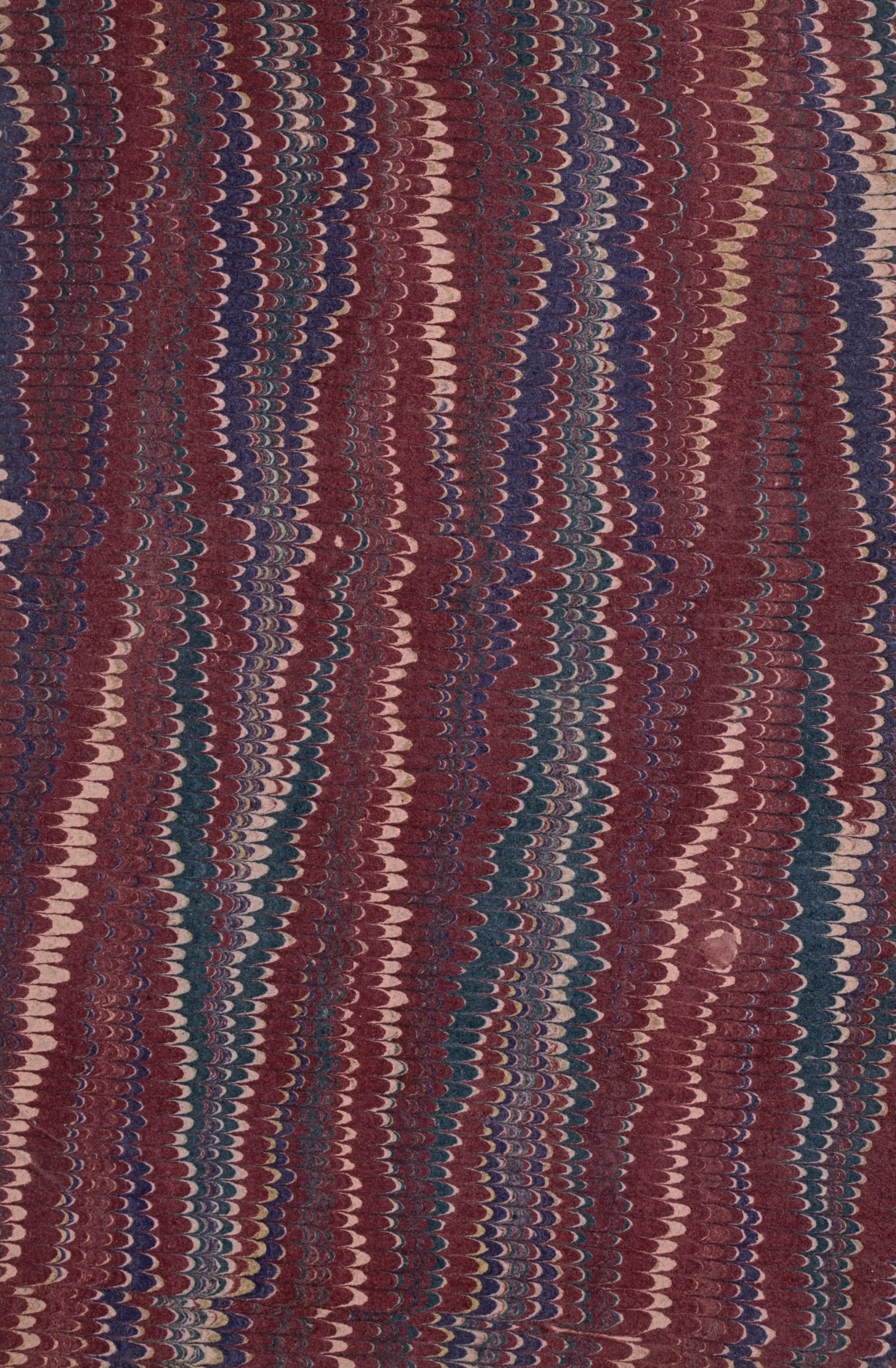


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